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THE PHILADELPHIAN

BY

LOUIS JOHN JENNINGS, M.P.

AUTHOR OF

'THE MILLIONAIRE,' 'FIELD PATHS,' 'RAMBLES AMONG THE HILLS,'
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE PHILADELPHIAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST CAUSE.

IN that part of the Shenandoah Valley to which some early settler gave the name of the 'Traveller's Rest,' and at no great distance from the old town of Winchester, there may still be seen one of the few remaining relics of the days when Virginia was 'the mother of presidents,' and the proudest State in the American Union. It is a house known as the Pendleton home-

stead—the roof covered with mosses, and the garden filled with weeds, but having a charm of its own even yet, in spite of neglect and ill-usage. It was built in the prosperous times when Virginians were accustomed to dispense hospitalities on a scale not unworthy of the descendants of the cavalier families, many of whom took refuge in the Old Dominion after their king perished on the scaffold. The long, rambling edifice covers a considerable space of ground, for it is all built upon one storey, with broad verandahs running completely round it.

From these verandahs the eye may roam over some of the most lovely scenery on the American continent; for, although there are much higher mountains than that chain of the Alleghanies which is called the Blue Ridge, there are none which enclose a fairer expanse of wood

and field and river. The land is rich, the farms have a look of comfort which is not always met with in the east or west, and over all there dwells that peculiar air of repose and peace which is characteristic of an English landscape, and which so rarely strikes the eye in any other part of the world.

Five-and-twenty years ago, widely different was the picture which the valley of the Shenandoah presented. The fertile lands lay desolate and barren, and the traveller might have gone for miles before meeting with a living creature, except in the towns, where the remnants of a broken and dispirited people had collected together, after a long separation, to realise in all its bitterness the magnitude of the disaster which had overwhelmed them in ruin. It was, indeed, but a scattered remnant, for not a family could be found

which had not given up one or more of its members, to fight for the cause of Secession—adopted late and with reluctance by Virginia, but defended when once adopted with a courage and devotion not soon to be forgotten by either North or South. The country had been swept bare by fire and sword; not even a barn was to be seen; there were no cattle left, and no fences to mark off the division of fields; the bridges were all destroyed, and even the trees had been cut down to supply fuel for the soldiers' camps.

Of all the miseries and calamities incidental to civil war, there were none which had not fallen on the inhabitants of this once happy valley. Heaps of charred wood and stones were alone left to mark the site of mansions which, a few years before, had been the pride of a high-spirited race. Time after time the opposing troops pur-

sued each other between the mountains, and sometimes even over them, now one side obtaining the victory, and now the other, until at last the threat of Sherman was fulfilled, that a crow should not be able to fly through the valley without carrying its rations in its beak. Round the town of Winchester itself at least half-a-dozen desperate battles were fought, and at the last and most fatal of them the wives and daughters of the overmatched Confederates came out into the streets, amid a shower of bullets, with trays of food for their wounded husbands, brothers, and friends. There was not a house which was not scarred all over with the traces of the fight; there was scarcely one in which some place by the hearth was not empty, or in which some mother was not weeping for her first-born, destined to return to her no more.

The Pendleton homestead had escaped the universal devastation by the lucky chance of a Northern general requiring it for his headquarters. When the Confederates in their turn held possession of the valley, they used it for the same purpose, and thus, no matter which side conquered, this house was always sure to be spared. The owner, Colonel Pendleton, had gone into the war unwillingly, like a large proportion of his people, but like them also he had fought gallantly for his State, in obedience to what he regarded as the paramount claims of duty.

In the fierce battle of Antietam, where the Confederates left twenty thousand of their men dead upon the field—the flower of the Southern population—Colonel Pendleton commanded a wing under General Lee, which was literally cut to pieces. All day long he was in the thickest of the fight;

again and again he led his men, even after their ammunition was all spent, to the defence of the bridge for the possession of which hundreds of gallant hearts faced death, hour after hour, without a thought of shrinking from their fate. At last, the few and broken survivors of the brilliant force which Colonel Pendleton had taken into action that morning were driven back, and, when they looked for their commander, he was no longer to be seen. He was lying, bleeding and unconscious, near a spot which is still known as 'Bloody Lane,' a lane between two farms, where the carnage was so terrific that upwards of eight thousand Virginians and Carolinians were buried in the fields hard by.

Fortunately for Colonel Pendleton, a poor negro woman who had lived on his estate saw and recognised him, and at the close of the day she managed to drag him

to her cabin, where assistance was procured in time to save his life. He survived to witness the dark and hopeless days through which the Confederacy was yet doomed to pass. He was with Jackson at Chancellorsville, when, in the gloom of a memorable evening, that type of the stern Puritans of old, riding out with his staff, was mistaken by his own men for the enemy, and fired upon. Colonel Pendleton had his horse killed under him; but once more he escaped. He helped to carry Stonewall Jackson to a place of safety, and was with him when, in his last hour, visions of brighter scenes than those which were desolating his beloved State passed across his dying eyes, and he murmured to the faithful band which surrounded him, 'Let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees.' River and trees were alike a dream. In a few hours he, too,

was gone, and with him died the hope of his followers ; but they still fought on, and Colonel Pendleton lived to see the disastrous day of Gettysburg, where he lost an arm, and to take a brave but despairing part in the awful struggle of the Wilderness.

It was well for him that he had been led by a spirit of enterprise, not very common among people of Southern birth, to invest a portion of his capital before the war broke out in a business which was destined to be improved rather than injured by the convulsions of the times. During a summer visit to Saratoga springs, he had become acquainted with the head of a large paper-making firm, known as Snapper and Purdy, carrying on its operations near the city of Philadelphia. Mr. Rufus Snapper was a great politician in his own State, but before all things he was a man of

business. A very short time before he made Colonel Pendleton's acquaintance, his partner had died, and the capital owned by his late associate was withdrawn from the concern. At the same moment, there occurred an opportunity of greatly extending his business, and, in talking the matter over with the Virginian, he found that the increased means which he desired, and a partner entirely after his own heart, were ready at his command.

Colonel Pendleton was a Southerner to the core, but he was no believer in the powers of expansion of his 'section.' He was glad of the opportunity of placing some part of his property in the North, where enterprise was always advancing, while the South stood still, or moved only towards decay. The reputation of Mr. Snapper for integrity stood deservedly high, and in entrusting his capital to the hands of the

Philadelphian, Pendleton incurred no more than the ordinary and legitimate risks of commercial affairs. Rufus Snapper dealt honourably with him, and scrupulously placed to his credit, throughout the war, his full share of the large profits which were shown at the end of each year. Regular correspondence between the two was impossible, and indeed it had happened that, for months together, Snapper knew not whether his partner was dead or alive. He was profoundly hostile to Secession, and looked upon the Confederates as a band of traitors, but that did not prevent him from assigning to the Virginian colonel all that in justice belonged to him.

And, during this time, the colonel himself was fighting in a uniform which had been so torn and rent, and so darned and patched, that it would scarcely hold together. He had been forced to subsist with his troops round

Petersburgh—the graveyard of the Confederacy—on mere remnants of food, varied occasionally by a dish of rats, or by a stewed dog which had been unwary enough to trust itself in the vicinity of Lee's starving forces. Although he knew it not, he was growing rich by paper-making on the banks of the Delaware, while his own people were reduced to printing their news on strips of paper torn from the walls of their houses. Paper, like articles of much greater importance—such as food and clothing, and medicine for the sick—was all gone. There was no luxury, scarcely even a necessity, of life to be had; nothing was left—nothing but despair in the hearts of the people. And still they fought on, until a fatal circle was drawn around them, and an invincible force, led by all the experienced generals of the North and backed up by its entire

strength, crushed out the last throes of their resistance.

At the close of the long struggle, Colonel Pendleton found himself a comparatively wealthy man. Throughout the four years of the war he had held scarcely any communication with the North; all his thoughts and desires were concentrated in the dire conflict which had swept him into its vortex. He had left his home at the first summons of his State, leaving behind him his wife and child. In the third year of the war the wife, worn out by care and anxiety, as so many women were in those sorrowful days, passed beyond the strife, and her daughter Edith—then about six years old—was sent to Winchester to a sister's house. There she was found by her father when he returned with a handful of his old comrades to their homes. The bare walls alone remained, for every-

thing else had been carried off during the last raid of Sheridan's cavalry. Hard is the fortune of war at the best, and it was the lot of Virginia to know what it can be made at its worst.

To remain in that region, fraught with so many corroding recollections and still plunged in the depths of poverty and humiliation, was not to be thought of. Most of the young men who once rode through the valley were now lying beneath the fields, and the survivors were without means and without hope. Their homes were embittered to them, and yet they could not seek new careers elsewhere. Their money, and everything which represented money's worth, had been swallowed up in the abyss of the Confederacy. The women wore black garments of homespun; the men had no employment open to them, no capital, and no friends who were not as

poor and helpless as themselves. Their fields were untilled ; it was for a long time uncertain whether the land would not be handed over to the negro, who was everywhere placed in authority over his masters. All local industries had been swept away ; all Confederate money was as valueless as the dead leaves of the fairy legends. Throughout the day the people wandered up and down the streets, or across the wild and naked plains which once had enriched them with bounteous harvests, seeking help and finding none. At night they met in each other's houses and talked of all that had happened during that vast tragedy, or listened by stealth to the half-proscribed songs which, in the first year of the war, had rung proudly and joyously through the valley—the 'Bonnie Blue Flag' or 'Dixie's Land.' But, after a time, it became known that these signs of a rebel

spirit only brought new misfortunes upon the people, and the sound of music was hushed.

After a few weeks spent amid these surroundings, the Confederate colonel, still suffering from his wound, determined to visit the land from which his ancestors had come, two centuries ago. His own country—for as such he looked upon Virginia—seemed to be doomed ; at any rate, there could be little chance of recovery for the generation to which he belonged. He and his daughter would seek a home with their distant kindred beyond the sea.

The child had entered upon life by a hard and cruel path ; almost ever since she could remember, the sights and sounds of war had been familiar to her. Yet she was more fortunate than many a child in that valley in finding, when the war was over, that she still had one parent left to

watch over her. She had scarcely seen her father except at long intervals, when his duty brought him near enough to admit of a flying visit to her temporary home. He took her to New York, where there were no houses pierced with bullet marks, no women dressed in homespun, no streets in ruins, no homes lying in ashes. Then they went on to England, and, long before the voyage was over, the child became deeply attached to the tall, sad-eyed gentleman, who always had a kind look and a gentle word for her. She was seldom out of his sight, and in her new and strange companionship another life seemed to be dawning upon him. He was like one who, between darkness and dawn, slowly shakes off the influence of an agitating dream.

So passed his days during that voyage ; but when the night came on, and he began

to resume his dreary march up and down the deck—for the habits acquired in four years' incessant warfare could not be quickly overcome, and sleep was harder than ever to be wooed—all the old scenes were re-enacted. Then there frequently appeared before his eyes, as he gazed over the dark waste of the Atlantic, the comrades who had fought by his side, and who, one by one, had followed their beloved general 'across the river,' and found perpetual rest beneath the 'shade of the trees.'

Then, too, he saw the face and form of his late chief as he appeared on that memorable day at Appomattox, when heroism could accomplish no more—when the last fight had been fought, and all was over, and for general and soldiers nothing remained but to part for ever. He felt the final pressure of Lee's hand, and saw the lingering crowd of gaunt, weary men,

striving hard to bravely bear themselves up as they passed through the last and hardest trial of all—the final separation from their beloved and care-worn leader. Once more he seemed to hear the few pathetic words in which the hero of the South, though borne down heavily by the weight of his own sorrows, sought to inspire his followers with resignation and hope. Once more there seemed to fall upon his ears the broken farewells of the last defenders of the Lost Cause. Many and many a year had passed before these things began to fade in the distance in the Confederate colonel's mind.

In England, then, he took up his abode for a time, the more readily because he had there a few devoted friends. Among them was a connection by marriage, who earnestly pressed him to accept the hospitalities of his roof.

Roland Clavering was the owner of a considerable estate in Wales, and of an old castle, such as might have been made the theme of a romance. It stood on the very verge of a wild and rocky part of the coast—its massive gates and portcullis, its terraced gardens, its vaulted corridors and subterranean chambers, all remaining much as they were five hundred years ago.

When Colonel Pendleton arrived in England, Roland Clavering was a widower, living in a solitude which would have been almost unbroken but for the companionship of an only son, a boy of about nine years. In the squire's younger days he had been much attached to a second cousin, but it had so happened that she and her family went to Virginia and never returned. This was the lady who had become Colonel Pendleton's wife. Her portrait was in the old house beneath the shadows of the Blue

Ridge, and it also hung in Roland Claver-
ing's dressing-room at Porthcawl Castle.
And now there was a daughter of this
cousin, motherless and practically home-
less, and the squire determined that her
home should henceforth be at Porthcawl.
At first, Colonel Pendleton had hesitated,
but, after a few months of intimacy with
Roland Clavering, his objections vanished
one by one.

His little girl, Edith, soon forgot amid
new and happier surroundings the melan-
choly which had enveloped her childhood.
The Shenandoah Valley, and all the sad
scenes which her young eyes had looked
upon, faded into a sort of mist in some
obscure recesses of her mind. She grew
up with the future heir of Porthcawl,
two inseparable companions, while her
father was travelling abroad, or making
almost aimless journeys in quest of some

relief for a restless spirit. But he and his friend, the Philadelphian, were frequently at Porthcawl, and during these visits the sombre old edifice underwent a partial transformation, for then Roland Clavering relaxed the obstinacy of his seclusion, and once more drew his neighbours and friends around him. Thus it was that the children, and even the squire himself, were always impatient for the return of the colonel and Mr. Snapper.

It chanced, however, one summer, that Roland Clavering was prevailed upon to accompany his two friends to Paris, and that little accident gave rise to the series of events now to be described. The entirely unexpected came to pass. Roland Clavering married a second time, after a short acquaintance with the lady upon whom his choice had fallen. His long solitude had perhaps done much to render him an easy

conquest for a clever woman, but certain it is that her supremacy over him became almost absolute. There was no difficulty in prevailing upon him to give up his favourite idea of educating his son at home, and to send him to school instead. At the age of seventeen Geoffrey Clavering had become almost a stranger in his father's house—in less than another year his return, except as an occasional guest, had become almost impossible.

Between that period and his twenty-second year, the squire and the heir scarcely ever met, and this estrangement had been mainly brought about by the new wife. And yet there were people who were blind enough not to perceive that she was a very clever woman. Her cleverness was, in fact, immense, but with it all she had not succeeded in inducing her husband to part with Edith Pendleton. She had employed

her utmost skill with that end in view, and still the colonel's daughter remained at Porthcawl. She was only about fifteen when her old playmate was first sent away ; she was now in her nineteenth year, and perhaps there was no one, not even excepting the squire, who had so keen an insight into the character of the second Mrs. Clavering as the colonel's daughter.

CHAPTER II.

THE FRIENDS.

IT is well known that, at the close of the war of Secession, water and fire were less likely to mingle than Northerner and Southerner to become friends. But Colonel Pendleton and Mr. Rufus Snapper were conspicuous exceptions to the rule. If the colonel had been told in the spring of 1865 that his investment in the paper-making business had gone the way of everything else, he would have looked upon it as a matter of course. But to learn that a considerable sum of money lay

waiting at his command took him completely by surprise. His simplicity and his sense of gratitude amused Mr. Snapper, who was not often brought into personal contact with either of those qualities.

After a time a great liking sprang up between the two men, and the very points of dissimilarity in their characters helped to increase it. Colonel Pendleton was of an active and excitable temperament, controlled by force of will; whereas Rufus Snapper was cool and stolid by nature. He surveyed the world and its ways either with a languid curiosity, or with cynical indifference, except when his own or his friends' interests were directly concerned, and then no man could be more keen and alert. He had accompanied Colonel Pendleton and his daughter to England, and had seldom been separated from both of them for any length of time ever since.

But, when Roland Clavering brought home his new wife, Rufus Snapper discontinued his visits to Porthcawl Castle. Colonel Pendleton often sought to ascertain his reason for this, but he could never get him to talk upon the subject until it turned out, one evening at the period with which we have now to deal, that Snapper himself suddenly introduced it, in the midst of some general reflections on the art of making money.

‘The fact is,’ he said, ‘no nation ever got on that had not the money-grubbing spirit in it. Look at England, look at America—I mean the Northern part of it, for your people of the South always had souls above money-getting. They were all for chivalry, not being able to see that the article is not kept in stock any more, in any market. In all your travels, you never yet met with a Crusader, with an iron pot on his head, and a long pole in

his hand, on his way to the Holy Sepulchre? No, colonel—the Crusader is gone, although the Sepulchre wants rescuing as much as ever. Chivalry will not enable a man to live in a good house and ride in his carriage, and so it died—except with you in the South. You held on to it till those days which you and I have agreed never to talk about.’

‘Well, at any rate it is dead enough there too,’ said the colonel, with a slight sigh which his friend’s ears were sharp enough to detect.

‘And a good thing, I should say, for everybody—except that it bred up men like you,’ added Snapper, in an undertone. ‘A little bit of romance in the world is well enough for pastime, but it never pays. You must get the best of everybody, if you can—even of your friends.’

‘That is not the principle you acted

upon with me, my dear Rufus; if you had, I don't know where I and my child might have been to-day.'

'Wait awhile,' replied Mr. Snapper, with a frown, 'don't put up my epitaph before I am dead. You and I have been good friends thus far, but we may not keep so if you let your daughter Edith shut herself up much longer in that old prison with our mad friend and his precious wife.'

Colonel Pendleton was taken aback at this violent sally upon Porthcawl Castle and its inmates.

'Mad?' he repeated. 'Come, come—that is a new idea of yours. Porthcawl is not exactly a penitentiary, and what on earth should induce you to think that our friend Roland Clavering is mad?'

'Has he not practically cast off his son for the sake of that woman? What did he marry her for?'

‘He never asked himself that question, I suppose; people seldom do when they are going to get married.’

‘That’s so,’ assented Snapper, the muscles of his mouth relaxing slightly. ‘If a man said, “What am I going to do it for?” he would sometimes be inclined to turn tail and run. But this was a very bad case. Your Welsh squire was not young, and his wife must be somewhere on the wrong side of forty. Why didn’t he come and ask *me* something about her,’ added Snapper, in a significant tone.

‘Because that would have been rather a strange thing to do, Rufus. People don’t generally go about getting certificates of their wives’ characters.’

‘It would often save them a great deal of trouble afterwards if they did. But this Mrs. Clavering could not have got one worth having at any price. I happen

to know all about her. Her first husband, Peter Rafferty, was once a clerk in my office in Philadelphia. I have reason to remember *him*.'

'A good clerk, was he?' said the colonel, who had long been aware that Rufus Snapper knew more about the squire's second wife than the squire himself.

'Good of his kind,' replied Snapper, in a dry tone, 'for those who like that kind. I did not. He was a smart man, was Peter—that I will always say. Nothing came amiss to him. I put everything into his hands, even the keys of the safe, for he had to be earlier to business than anybody else. Nothing went wrong until one fine morning, and then it went so wrong that it never got right again. My friend Peter did not get up early for nothing that morning!'

'You mean to say he robbed you?'

‘Cleaned me right out; all the money, and everything that could be turned into money, was gone. When I came to find out all about it, I discovered that my cashier’s wife had dragged him into debt all over the place, after leading him to speculate on the stock exchange. There was no keeping pace with her demands for money. The amount that Peter Rafferty helped himself to out of my safe did not put him straight. He had to cut and run, of course.’

‘And what about his wife?’

‘She ran too, as hard as she could go—in the other direction. She was not handicapped much with chivalry, you see, colonel. She had rather a better time after Peter went away than before,’ added Mr. Snapper, in a musing tone; ‘and when Rafferty died—which he had the good sense to do—she came straight off

to Europe with the famous Mrs. Rozier.'

'Yes, yes. I have heard of *her*, at any rate.'

'Most people have,' said Mr. Snapper, with an odd look. 'She was a New Yorker, and married poor old Van Zandt, the knickerbocker. She pretty soon knickerbockered *him* into another planet, and waltzed off to Paris with his fortune. Now she wouldn't speak to an American to save her life, unless nobody happened to be looking. Nothing less than a French count will do for her. How pleased old Van Zandt must be if he is able to look down—or *up*—and see where his money is going to.'

'But Mrs. Rafferty—surely she was not a woman of the same kind?'

'Pretty much,' said Mr. Snapper, with an emphatic nod. 'Only she was rather poor till our friend Clavering came along,

and then she played her cards for the big stakes and won. I would have given the squire a hint, but I never had the least idea he was in danger until he was sunk out of sight—head over heels in love, as people say. Besides, the woman was sharp as a needle; she more than half deserved to win. Only she is not a proper person for your daughter Edith to be living with, colonel. I have told you so a dozen times.'

'So you have, but you know how attached Edith is to the old squire. She will never leave him unless I urge it upon her, and I cannot find it in my heart to do it. I cannot forget how Roland Clavering befriended us both when we were strangers and friendless—but for you.'

'I don't want you to forget it, but Clavering has got his wife to look after him—he would not be solitary, I suppose, if

Edith left Porthcawl? His own son, of course, he has driven away, and I suppose he is not quite ready to adopt Peter Rafferty's.'

'I forgot all about him. If ever he went to Porthcawl Castle, that would settle your anxieties about Edith; she would not remain an hour in the house with the sort of man I have always understood this Rafferty to be.'

'You can't have heard anything too bad of him. He lives at Birmingham, and not very long ago I saw his mother, Mrs. Clavering, there on a visit to him. She was about as handsome as ever; a regular high-stepper, but when she saw me she did not step quite so high.'

'She knew you?'

'Well, we had a little negotiation to conduct together once,' replied Mr. Snapper, mysteriously. 'And I have made it

my business to become acquainted with her son—for reasons of my own. Some day he will be taken to Porthcawl to supersede poor Geoffrey Clavering in the squire's affections. That is the game we have to watch, colonel, for I take it for granted you do not want to see Geoffrey come to grief. We have both known him since he was a boy, and I have taken his part all the way through.'

'You have been the best friend he has had, Rufus. And even now I believe he trusts you more than anyone else.'

'I wish he had trusted me a little sooner,' said Snapper, on the impulse of the moment, but it was easy to see that he immediately regretted the words which had escaped his lips.

He looked at Colonel Pendleton anxiously to see what impression they had made upon him. The colonel was appa-

rently deep in thought. Presently he looked up and said,

‘Is there anything wrong with Geoffrey Clavering, Rufus? One cannot help noticing that you have been very much concerned about him the last year or two.’

‘I have almost looked upon him as my own son,’ said the Philadelphian, rather wearily, ‘from the time he and Edith were youngsters playing together. I think he has been badly used; or perhaps it is the way over here. These English fathers are stern—I would almost as soon have to do with a Roman father if I were a young man. Geoffrey was a little wild, and had debts—two very bad things. But his father should not have been quite so pitiless. The mischief between them was owing to that second marriage rather than to Geoffrey’s blunders. He went away from home, as you know, and after that—’

Here Snapper's voice fell, he muttered a few words to himself, and once more resumed the silence which often fell upon him when Geoffrey Clavering was under discussion. Colonel Pendleton saw this and sought to turn his thoughts into another channel.

‘So you think Mrs. Clavering means to put her son in Geoffrey's place, so far as she can?’

‘Ah, let us come back to Polly Rafferty,’ said Mr. Snapper, shaking himself as if some disturbing influences were over him. ‘I don't like her, and yet I admire her for her skill.’

‘And I think you said something about her beauty just now,’ interposed the colonel, slyly.

‘That I take no notice of. What interests me is her cleverness. She beat you, she beat me, and she beat the squire.

The only person she has not beaten is a young girl who seems to have more sense than all the rest of us put together—your own daughter, colonel.'

'Edith will, at least, not be driven off the field by her,' remarked the colonel, in a tone which Mr. Snapper perfectly understood.

'And the squire's son was, you mean to say. Well, he could scarcely help himself, poor fellow. He was only eighteen—not a safe age for a young fellow, brought up as he had been, to be turned loose upon the world. Now, if he had been cast in the same sort of mould as Sam Rafferty, I should not have cared a pin what had become of him.'

'I never could make out why you interested yourself at all in that scamp.'

'He is well worth it,' replied Mr. Snapper, with an odd smile. 'To begin with,

he is the son of my old clerk, and may perhaps pay me back some day the money his father took out of my safe. You laugh, colonel, but we never can tell what may happen. I admit that Sam Rafferty does not seem to be much in the way of paying off old claims just now. He lives upon his mother, and earns enough to pay for his drink and tobacco by acting as secretary for some political club. But his expectations are all centred in and around Porthcawl Castle, especially since Geoffrey Clavering went from it. His mother has many faults; I am almost inclined to think that her affection for Sam is one of them, although he is her own son. By-the-by, he is not at all like Peter Rafferty.'

'Not in character, I hope,' said the colonel, noticing something significant in Mr. Snapper's tone.

'He might be worse even than his

father!—but I was referring to his face. He reminds me of some one I have known, but it is not Peter. Anyhow, his mother is wrapped up in him—gives him all the money he asks for, and would give him more if she had it. Of late he has not had quite so much ; perhaps Mrs. Clavering has found a use for her spare cash elsewhere. That has made Master Sam rather impatient. He has confided to me his opinion that Roland Clavering would be better out of the world than in it.'

Mr. Snapper scanned his friend's countenance to ascertain how he regarded this hint. He was not left in a moment's doubt.

'Do you mean to say,' said the colonel, in a low voice, 'that you think the squire is in any danger?'

'Where a fellow like Rafferty is concerned,' replied Snapper, cautiously, 'it is

well to be on your guard, on general principles. He wants money—he takes after his dear mother in that respect—and he has got it into his head that he will be rich when the squire dies. He has some desperately bad associates, among them a man you know something about by repute—Patrick Daly.’

‘The fellow who tried to blow up the Cunard steamer?’

‘The very same. They are always together, and never for any good, you may be sure. Every day I regret more and more this feud between Roland Clavering and his son.’

‘And Edith is always regretting it. She has tried over and over again to heal the quarrel, but you know how obstinate they are, father and son. It is in the race. By-the-by, where is Geoffrey Clavering now? He has not been to see me for a

long time—not since Edith was here in London with us.’

‘He never fails to come when she is here,’ remarked Mr. Snapper, and the colonel thought he saw a gloomy shadow steal across his friend’s face. ‘It is natural that these young people should be attached to each other, and yet——’

‘You would not have it otherwise?’

‘I cannot quite say what I would have,’ answered Snapper, in a manner which was unusual with him. ‘Geoffrey and Edith were brought up together, but she was very young when he left his home. He could not then have had the same feelings towards her that he—he may have now.’

Mr. Snapper had hesitated some time before completing this sentence, and at last he huddled it up in a hurried sort of way.

‘But surely there is nothing that we need be uneasy about?’

‘I suppose not; for the present, at any rate. I think, however, that we ought to remember they are no longer children. And Geoffrey’s circumstances are not quite what we should like them to be——’

‘You mean as regards debt?’

The colonel had been watching his friend attentively during the last few moments, and could not fail to notice—as he had often done on similar occasions—that Mr. Snapper was embarrassed, and showed some anxiety to get away from the topic.

‘I mean debt—and other things. There is nothing that can be done to remedy whatever may be wrong at present. Now, my dear colonel, I must go,’ said Mr. Snapper, with a sudden haste which might have surprised an ordinary observer. ‘I

have much to do, and to tell you the truth I have promised to see Geoffrey Clavering this very evening. If anything occurs that I think you will be pleased to hear about, be sure I will tell you.' And as he went downstairs he muttered to himself, 'There is about as much chance of *that* as there is of my flying. I wonder what the colonel would say if he knew all?'

Colonel Pendleton did not know all, but he knew enough to set him thinking very seriously for some hours after Mr. Snapper's departure.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. CLAVERING AND HER SON.

WHEN Roland Clavering married that second wife, of whom Mr. Snapper had given some account, his son had real cause for discontent. For, to begin with, no one knew precisely who the new Mrs. Clavering was or whence she came. In the midst of the fashionable season at Paris, she made her appearance one evening at a reception given by the minister of the United States, who happened to be the Honourable Elisha Grout, a gentleman who, having met with

great success as a local 'wire-puller,' was rewarded with a foreign mission. To be sure, he did not understand a word of French when the appointment was given to him; but during the few weeks he spent at Washington, waiting for the Senate to confirm his nomination, he took lessons every day, and the 'rest could be picked up,' as he told the President, 'on the voyage.' And the fact is that he succeeded in picking up enough to go on with. He could ask for bread, or salt, or wine at the table, and, as for official business, the secretary was quite competent to look after that. Mr. Grout did not pride himself on being what he called a good 'diplomat,' but he made up his mind that his country should not suffer in his hands.

The lady who afterwards married Mr. Clavering had known the Hon. Elisha in his own country, and she soon managed to

make herself free of the legation. She was a fine, showy-looking woman, somewhere over forty, as Mr. Snapper had truly said, but looking much less. She had a profusion of light hair, and a fair complexion which made her look very fresh and young, especially under artificial light. The nicest observation would have failed to detect any wrinkles around her mouth, or crows'-feet about her eyes. Her figure was excellent; no girl of five-and-twenty would have been ashamed to own it. She was tolerably well-informed, and could take part in a conversation with persons much more gifted than herself without suffering in any way by the comparison.

It is a great thing to be able to produce the impression that one is cleverer than is actually the case; by means of this art, many a man has risen to a high position in public life. The fair widow—for she

was a widow, and her name, as Mr. Snapper had correctly informed Colonel Pendleton, was Rafferty—could not make this accomplishment useful to her more effectually than by winning over to her side distinguished men. By showing them how quickly she could enter into their ideas, by making one or two appreciative or suggestive remarks now and then, Mrs. Rafferty managed to give them a high opinion of her mental powers, and yet she wisely took care to let her fascinations as a woman always come into the foreground. With men, as she very well knew, it must be beauty first; intellect (if at all) afterwards. She even succeeded in making a temporary impression upon the minister himself, who, honestly speaking, cared nothing whatever about women, and was all but insensible to their charms. What he understood and liked was a game at euchre, and his

talk after dinner was chiefly of the left bower or the right bower, or of playing a 'lone hand;' and so partial was he to lone hands that Mrs. Rafferty saw very early in the day that it would be folly to waste any powder and shot upon him.

Roland Clavering, it has been stated, was spending a few months in Paris, and, Mr. Grout being an old acquaintance of his, he became rather a frequent visitor at the legation. There he was thrown into the captivating society of Mrs. Rafferty, and as it was perfectly well known that, besides his landed estate, he had a large amount of money in the funds, which he would be free to dispose of according to his own inclination, the handsome widow paid him considerable attentions, without giving anyone reason to suspect that she had any ulterior design in view. She manifested a judicious admiration for him

in a thousand different ways ; she showed a distinct preference for his society, she delighted to converse with him, and always understood him in an instant, and sympathised with all his thoughts. In a word, she exerted her entire resources, and they were many, to win the prize, and in the end she succeeded.

Roland Clavering, then a man of the ripe age of sixty, fell completely in love with her. Some persons fancy that men of sixty cannot fall in love ; that this is among the happy privileges reserved for the young. There could not be a greater mistake. Fortunately or unfortunately, no age is completely exempt from liability to attacks of this malady, and careful inquiry would show that fifty or sixty is a peculiarly susceptible period of life. Love is not one of the infantile complaints, like measles, and even measles sometimes

defers its visits till very late in the day, or calls a second time.

But, in truth, Roland Clavering was still young in thought and feeling. He had never gone through a severe illness, and thus far had known no great trouble. His home had long been without a mistress, and it seemed to him that this gay and sparkling widow was the very person to enliven it. She would be a companion for the daughter of his dear friend, Colonel Pendleton. She was perfectly candid with him—up to a certain point. She told him that she was very young at the time of her first marriage, and that her husband had long been dead. So far, all was well. But the widow also had to explain that she had a son, a young man whose age she did not mention, for fear of startling the Welsh squire. The mention of the son caused Roland Clavering to look rather blank,

but the unwelcome news was tempered by the announcement—which was purely fictitious—that Samuel Rafferty was living with his late father's friends in America, and had never been in Europe.

‘Let us hope he never will be,’ said Roland to himself, and if he had said it aloud the widow would not have been particularly offended.

As for his predecessor in the lady's affections, extremely little was said, for Mrs. Rafferty was not one of those women who love to talk of their first husbands. She very seldom made any allusion to Peter Rafferty, and it is needless to say that she did not think it necessary to enter into any particulars concerning his mode of life in Philadelphia, or his little indiscretion in connection with Mr. Rufus Snapper's greenbacks and bonds. Peter was dead—why should she drag his misdoings

into the light of day? She was the occasion of most of them, she knew; so much the more reason was there why she should let them rest with him peaceably in Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia. Therefore of Peter she said nothing, and so little curiosity had Roland Clavering concerning him that he looked upon her reticence as one of the numerous virtues which he had already discovered in her.

When Mrs. Clavering first saw Porthcawl Castle, which she did about six weeks after her marriage, the impression made upon her mind was that, between being buried alive at once and taking up her residence within those gloomy walls, there was no great difference. But she was playing for high stakes, as Mr. Snapper had said, and she was not the woman to lose them through a mere caprice. As for the inmates of the Castle, she did not

think it necessary to concern herself much about them, at least so early in the day. Edith Pendleton was but a child, and the squire's son, Geoffrey, did not at first cause her much anxiety—not nearly so much, for instance, as her own.

As time went on, she found it no difficult matter to bring about a coldness between the squire and Geoffrey Clavering. Some debts that the young man had contracted, some follies at the university which reached his father's ears in a highly-aggravated form, finally one or two acts of deplorable, though not premeditated, insubordination—these things broke down the confidence of the father in the son. Mrs. Clavering acted throughout with unflinching coolness and dexterity. On the one side she established a sense of ingratitude; on the other, of a grievance. She showed her husband what his son might

have been to him, had he been well disposed, by taking nearly all the care of his estate off his hands, and by managing his affairs far better than ever they had been managed before. All this, with the aid of her undeniably great personal attractions, weighed sufficiently with Roland Clavering to make him resent the antipathy, and even hostility, which his son displayed towards his wife. For Geoffrey Clavering was injudicious, and, instead of waiting quietly to see the nature of the strategy which he would be required to counteract, he declared war upon his accomplished step-mother. She bore it with an angelic temper, and in less than a year she had contrived to drive him out of the house.

Whether or not all this had been planned with a view to an alteration in the succession—at least to the money in the funds—by the substitution of her own son for the

rightful heir, may perhaps never be known ; but certain it is that, a few months after these events, Samuel Rafferty received a quiet hint from his mother to the effect that he might venture to call upon her at the Castle. At the same time, she intimated to the squire that Samuel might shortly be expected from abroad on a brief visit to England.

Now the place abroad in which Samuel had been residing happened to be a back street in Birmingham. There he had rendered himself extremely active, and as some thought useful, in the management of 'machine' politics—for Sam Rafferty was an ardent politician, and devoted a good deal of thought, of a certain kind, to the well-being of his country. He was a regular speaker at the 'club,' and no one possessed more influence with the rank and file except his bosom friend,

Enoch Trigger. But there was this difference between the two men : that, whereas Enoch Trigger was always cool-headed and sober, Sam Rafferty was generally a little—and sometimes a great deal—under the influence of drink. But, whatever were his failings, his mother had never lost faith or hope in him ; she felt convinced that if he had but a fair chance, he would cut a distinguished figure in the world. The genteel poverty she had been called upon to endure for many years had kept him down.

‘ If he could only get an opportunity !’ she would say to herself, whenever she thought of him ; and now, perhaps, the opportunity had come. If the squire could be brought to look upon him with her eyes, there was no telling what might happen. Things must be so arranged as that Samuel should make his appearance unobtrusively at Porthcawl Castle, and

ingratiate himself with its lord—and this he could scarcely fail to do. Such was the mother's fond belief.

At last, all her plans were complete. The day to which she had looked forward so anxiously arrived—and so did Sam Rafferty. But, alas! it was neither at the time, nor in the state which his mother expected or desired. He came early in the afternoon, and was so amazed and delighted at the imposing aspect of his mother's new home, and so elated at the prospect of good cheer within, that he insisted on being shown at once into the presence of the squire, who was, he felt satisfied, waiting with open arms to receive him. He was confident of this, because all the way down he had stopped at every station to drink copiously and heartily to the squire's health; and surely this entitled him to a warm greeting in

return. His mother was out for a drive. This the genial Sam regarded as a peculiarly good stroke of luck, for he was rather afraid of his mother, whereas he knew by intuition that he and his new step-father would take a fancy one to another on the instant. In that belief he followed the footman into the library.

Roland Clavering, who retained the fastidious tastes of a gentleman of the old school, was somewhat surprised when he scanned his visitor. He had never before seen anyone of that kind in his own room. The stranger was clad in a light brown check suit, admirably adapted to be seen clearly from a long distance. His neck-tie was of a bright blue, and he carried a white 'wide-awake' in his hand—it was by the merest accident that it was not on his head. He might, perhaps, be five-and-twenty or thereabouts, but he seemed

older—there was a worn and sodden look on his face, and he brought into the room with him a potent aroma of brandy and tobacco smoke. Such was the person who had come prepared to make himself at home at Porthcawl Castle.

‘The young man says he wants to see you, sir, on important business from Mrs. Clavering,’ said the footman, as he withdrew from the room.

‘Has anything happened to Mrs. Clavering?’ asked the squire, with a sudden tremor in his voice.

‘Not that I know of, sir,’ replied Sam, a little abashed for the moment. A dim instinct floated about his mind that he was treading on dangerous ground, and that he might possibly have made a horrible mistake in not waiting to see his mother first. But his habitual self-complacency was soon restored, and he decided

to give the respected relation before him a pleasant surprise. The libations he had drunk to the squire were doing their work thoroughly. 'There is nothing the matter,' he said, with a vacant smile; 'at least, if there is, Mrs. Clavering has not told me.'

'Then what has brought you here?' said Roland, now standing with his back to the fire and surveying the intruder with a keen glance which again made Sam vaguely wish that he were somewhere else.

He could not recollect that he had ever seen so cold and satirical a countenance as that on which his own bleared eyes now rested. The squire was tall, thin, scrupulously dressed, and with a remarkably well-turned and youthful figure. He continued to contemplate Mr. Rafferty with a stern composure which brought a slight flush to that worthy's sallow cheeks.

'I came,' said he, doggedly, 'by invita-

tion. I didn't want to come particularly. The other arrangement suited me very well.'

'To what other arrangement are you pleased to refer?' asked the squire, whose peculiar manner was gradually exasperating the stranger.

'You don't know anything about it, I suppose? Then let *her* explain. She wanted me to come here. For my part, I am not used to swells.'

'Are you not? Well, do not mind that. Let me know presently, when you are quite at your ease, the nature of your errand. Is it urgent?'

'This is Porthcawl Castle, isn't it?' returned Sam, getting angry.

'I have every reason to believe so.'

'And you are Mr. Clavering?'

'That is my name.'

'Very good,' said Sam, slapping the

table. ‘Then we are all right. I like the place, what I have seen of it, and should have liked it none the worse if you had asked me to sit down. If I have not a right to ask for a chair in this house, it *is* a rum go. All the same, I like the place—it’s like a crack scene at Drury Lane. And, although you seem a little stiff, I have no doubt I shall like you too, by-and-by.’

‘I trust so—I trust so,’ said the squire, still never taking his eyes from his visitor’s face. ‘Meantime, may I beg permission to know your name?’

‘Presently—all in good time,’ replied Sam, now resolved to stand his ground, happen what might. ‘First of all, is my—*is* Mrs. Clavering at home?’

The squire’s countenance darkened for a moment, and an ominous frown appeared upon his brow. But it speedily passed

away, and he said, in his usual calm voice,

‘If you have business with Mrs. Clavering, you will not have long to wait for her. They shall show you to the servants’ hall.’

‘The servants’ hall!’ shouted Sam, now completely roused. ‘Do you know who it is that you are talking to?’

‘It is the very thing I have been vainly trying to find out ever since you entered this room.’

‘I’ll soon let you know then—although you might have guessed. You married a relation of mine, I believe, although you are so high and mighty, and look down upon me as so much dirt. I wonder you ever condescended to marry into *our* family. My name is Rafferty, and I have come to see my mother.’

‘That being so, sir,’ said the squire, with unalterable composure, ‘you will be kind

enough to amuse yourself as well as you can with these papers and books, and—' here Sam fancied he once more detected that very unpleasant flavour of sarcasm— 'and ring should you desire refreshments.'

' Well, I'm blowed !' cried Sam, fanning his face with his dirty white hat, as the squire departed from the room. The day was not hot, but the interview had made Sam feel so. ' A man mustn't come to see his own mother now, I suppose. A pretty lot these landlords are ! It makes me tingle all over only to think how that old swell kept looking at me. I might have been some curiosity out of a menagerie. It's all very fine to talk about everybody being your "own flesh and blood," but this squire hasn't taken rightly to that doctrine yet. How he looked at me, with that sarcastic smile on his face ! I should like to wring his neck for him !' (Here Sam

began to pace up and down the room in an excited manner.) ‘How much longer shall we submit to this insolence of caste? Shall we tolerate—shall we go on submitting to this grinding tyranny of the rich over the poor? Shall we—I say again, shall we——’ but here the door opened suddenly, and Sam was interrupted in a sort of day-dream, for he thought he was addressing his own club in Birmingham.

‘Did you call, sir?’ said the footman, and undoubtedly Sam had spoken his last few sentences in a loud tone. It appeared to him that the man was laughing in his sleeve.

‘Curse you,’ he cried, now thoroughly beside himself, ‘I will ring here some day to a tune you will not like! Tell your master that. He thinks he’s living in the middle ages, but we’ll teach him the time of day before we’ve done with him. Now

let me get out of this!' The wondering servant conducted him to the door, and Mr. Rafferty shook his fist at him as he went through the courtyard. The man thought that he was mad.

When Mrs. Clavering returned, she went straight up to her husband, and kissed him warmly, as was her wont. She was even handsomer than usual, and the long drive in the fresh air, together with her anticipation of her son's joyful visit, had imparted a new lustre to her eyes.

'My dear,' said the squire, 'we have had a stranger here.'

'A stranger!' repeated his wife, turning very pale.

'He said his name was Rafferty, and called himself your son. I do not believe that he was telling the truth, but I left him in the library.'

Mrs. Clavering went quickly out of the

room, and, although she found that her son was gone, she soon learned everything that she could bear to know concerning his visit. There was but one alleviating circumstance in it all—the servants had not heard the visitor avow himself to be her son. Her humiliation was not known to them. But when she thought of her husband, and of the utter and final collapse of all her hopes and plans, her heart sank within her, and she hid herself in her own room, a more miserable woman than she had ever been in her life, and that was saying much.

CHAPTER IV.

GEOFFREY CLAVERING'S VISITORS.

YOUNG Clavering had taken up his abode in the Albany, in a set of chambers which once belonged to a middle-aged bachelor who was famous for his dinners and his skilful concoction of iced drinks in hot weather. He had travelled much, and learned much ; all sorts of new ways of first tempting hunger and thirst, and then luxuriously gratifying them, were known to him, and to him alone.

There were no such little dinners a dozen

years ago as poor Ditton's, but in the very zenith of their reputation they suddenly came to an end. One morning, the valet tapped at his master's door, and heard no answer. He tapped again, and yet again ; all was silence. Then he went in, and saw that the modern Lucullus was not yet awake—his head was reclining peacefully on his pillow, his hand was lying outside the coverlet, his countenance was tranquil. 'He is sleeping like a child,' whispered the valet ; but in reality some one had tapped at the door before him—the messenger who will take no denial. Sooner or later, every traveller must eat his last dinner and sleep his last sleep. These rooms were to let.

Geoffrey Clavering was not thinking of his predecessor when he sat down to wait for Mr. Rufus Snapper, although it was evident that his reflections were by no

means of a cheerful cast. He had found a letter on his table which informed him that a visitor less welcome than the Philadelphian might be expected at any moment. This man he had been expecting fully half-an-hour, and his patience was nearly exhausted when his servant entered and informed him that the visitor had arrived.

The outward appearance of the stranger might not have gained for him ready admission to the classic precincts of the Albany, but by this time he had made himself well known to the porters at each end of the passage. They wondered what he could want with Mr. Clavering, or Mr. Clavering with him; but they asked no questions, and if they had, the visitor would have known how to deal with them. He was a man apparently of fifty-two or three, with rather long hair, tall and erect in figure, younger than his age in manner.

There was an expression of mingled resolution and cunning in his face which alone would have made a good judge of men shy of having much to do with him. He came into the room with an air of easy assurance, and took a chair without waiting for the formality of being asked. He unbuttoned his shabby coat and crossed his legs comfortably before the fire. The light of the lamp was sufficient to afford a glimpse of his stockings through holes in his boots.

‘You wonder what brings me here, I suppose,’ said he presently, for Clavering had scarcely returned his greeting; ‘and it is a little too soon, I must admit. But we have been ill, first one and then the other, and there was a doctor, and doctors do not come to see even us for nothing. You hear what a cough I still have.’

Clavering made no reply, but there was a significant shrug of the shoul-

ders which did not escape the visitor's attention.

‘Yes, I understand; it might be a good deal worse before you would be alarmed. Yet we have once been great friends, and what harm I have done you, I cannot for the life of me see.’

‘I don't suppose you can,’ said Claver-ing, with a hard laugh, getting up to light a cigar.

The stranger stretched out his hand for the box, and helped himself.

‘There are no cigars like yours,’ he remarked, in a tone of satisfaction. ‘I will take two—one to smoke as I go home, with your permission. This is one of the greatest pleasures of my little visits here.’

‘Make your visit brief,’ said Claver-ing, curtly. ‘It is the old story, I suppose?’

‘Well,’ said the man, leaning back in

his chair, and puffing slowly at his cigar with intense enjoyment, 'there is not much change in it, that's a fact. I should like to make a little variation in it—to the effect that some one had left us five or ten thousand pounds, for instance. That may happen some day, but meanwhile we must live, and ready money is the first necessity of life. It happens, unfortunately for us both, that I do not know where I can go for money but to you.'

'I have told you before that I would not pay more than was agreed, and only upon the days fixed. You have largely overdrawn the allowance now——'

'But not for myself,' interrupted the man.

'That I do not believe. I doubt very much whether any of this money ever goes out of your hands—except to the public-house.'

‘ Well, why not make inquiries?’ asked the man, cheerfully.

‘ I shall get at the truth in time, never fear. Meanwhile, I see no reason to give you anything to-night—therefore the sooner you leave this room the better.’

‘ If you refuse me, you will act unwisely,’ replied the visitor, showing no disposition whatever to move. ‘ What will you gain by driving me to get money in—in another quarter? At present, all I want is five pounds—for cough medicine,’ he added, laughing. ‘ We must have it, for I tell you we are very bad, although you pretend not to believe it. It is not agreeable to come here and ask for it, but what can I do?’

‘ You are a worthless scoundrel,’ said Clavering, his anger rising in spite of the manifest effort he had been making to control himself.

‘Bah!’ said the visitor, snapping his fingers. ‘I have not come here to receive your compliments. What does it matter what I am? I want five pounds—and for the sake of that you will make a fuss. Is it worth your while? I doubt it. Now reflect,’ he continued—and in spite of his disreputable air he was evidently a man of some cultivation.—‘What complaint have you to make against me, except that now and then I have come a little before my time? Is that so great a sin? Can I help liking you? But for the fear of offending you, I would call once a week or so, for the pleasure of passing even a few moments in your society. But I humour your prejudices, and stay away. This is my reward.’

There was a slight tone of mockery in his voice which may have been intended to exasperate, but the younger man was resolved not to lose his temper.

‘Enough of this farce,’ he said, coolly but firmly; ‘you have told me your errand, and I have said no. Now go!’

‘But you would not have me return quite empty-handed,’ remonstrated the visitor. ‘You have shown a *little* consideration for others before now; I think you will do so again if you think about it for a few moments. Why push matters to extremities?’

‘Matters, as you call it, shall not go on much longer like this.’

‘With all my heart,’ replied the visitor, his manner becoming more defiant. ‘The sooner they go on in some other way, the better. You cannot be more tired than I am of this game. It is kept up to oblige you, not for my benefit. Will you propose some other plan? Or shall I do it for you?’

Clavering made a movement which

scared the man for a moment. He rose to his feet, and raised his hand in a deprecating manner.

‘Do not get excited,’ he said, quietly. ‘That servant of yours outside need not know everything just yet. Would you rather have a scandal than give me the beggarly sum I ask for? I assure you it is not for myself—it is to relieve the wants of others. I am not deceiving you, I swear it!’

He spoke earnestly, and for the first time his words seemed to make an impression upon Geoffrey Clavering. He seemed to hesitate, and a smile passed quickly over the lips of the visitor. Clavering took a five-pound note and threw it across the table with less ceremony than he would have used in tossing a biscuit to a dog.

‘Very good,’ said the man, taking up the note with perfect contentment. ‘I

thought you would be reasonable. You are impetuous, but not bad-hearted. So! Permit me to light my second cigar. When I talk I smoke fast, and you have made me talk a good deal to-night. You are not going to offer me anything to drink, I suppose? Do not be in a hurry,' he added, as he saw Clavering putting out his hand to ring the bell. 'In one moment I am off. Only a single question before I go: have you *no* message whatever to send—not even a word? There will be inquiry for you—what am I to say?'

'Take your pay, and go back to your pot-house,' said Clavering, contemptuously.

'And a devilish good place it is to go back to,' said the other, gaily. 'I have been in many a worse. You will not say good-night? Well, that is not very civil, but then you have *not* been so civil of late as you were formerly. I have frequently

remarked it—to others. A great change has come over you! I ascribe it to temporary ill-humour, and forgive it. Good-night—do not trouble to ring. I know my way out. So there is *no* message, I think you said,' he added, with his hand on the door.

'Go,' said Clavering, now fairly roused, 'go, and if you could be induced to hang yourself, there would be one villain the less in the world.'

The man bowed, smiled pleasantly, waved an adieu to Clavering, and in a few moments was in Piccadilly. There he crossed over to a public-house, laughing heartily to himself.

'Another fiver,' he muttered, 'but not for me—it is for cough-mixture! And very good the mixture is in this neighbourhood, a deuced deal better than in my part of London. Hang' myself! Come, come!

The young one is facetious to-night. Why should I hang myself while you are alive, Geoffrey? Have you ever asked yourself that? No, my boy—I will go and drink your health in a tumbler of brandy-and-water, and hope to repeat the dose for many years at your expense.'

He kept his word, and more than kept it, for when he again made his appearance in the street an hour afterwards, his steps were straggling and uncertain, and, as he piloted his course eastwards, snatches of jovial songs beguiled the way. Meanwhile, Mr. Rufus Snapper was closeted with young Clavering. He had divined what had taken place the moment he entered the room.

'I see who has been here,' he said, with a little groan. 'There is no keeping that vagabond away!'

'Apparently not.'

‘More money?’ inquired Mr. Snapper, briefly.

‘Five pounds.’

‘Not for himself, of course?’

‘No—medical attendance wanted for a sick person.’

They both laughed, but there was not much mirth in their laughter.

‘Almost anything would be more endurable than this,’ said Clavering, after a pause, during which Mr. Snapper had been sunk in thought. ‘I am sometimes inclined to let him do his worst, and go to my father with his tale.’

‘Not yet,’ said Snapper, slowly; ‘it may come to that, but we must put it off. Sometimes there is nothing to be gained by delay, in this case there is. There is not alone your father to consider—you have other friends.’

‘You mean Colonel Pendleton,’ said the younger man, changing countenance.

‘He is very much attached to you; we must spare him pain if we can.’

‘He has not the slightest idea of all this?’

‘Not the slightest. You asked me to keep your secret, and I have done so. No one would be benefited now by its disclosure. But it is not easy to deceive friends so true as the colonel—and his daughter.’

Mr. Snapper pronounced the last three words in a manner which evidently was intended to strike Clavering’s attention.

‘That is the worst part of it all,’ said the young man, deeply moved. ‘Sometimes I can scarcely bear to look either of those dear friends in the face. And Edith is gentler than ever—I am only beginning to understand her worth. I have nearly

been begging you once or twice to tell her all.'

'Thank you,' replied Snapper, gravely, 'I would rather not. You see a good deal of her?'

'Whenever she comes to London.'

'And of course she is always glad to see you—*that* I know without you telling me.'

'Naturally—recollect what friends we have been from the first.'

'Exactly,' said Snapper, who had been reading the younger man's face with a steadfast eye. 'But you must recollect that neither of you can be looked upon as quite the same as when you were at Porthcawl Castle. Edith is not a child—and you——' Mr. Snapper paused, and seeing a look of sharp pain in the eyes of his friend, he went over to him and touched him gently. 'I do not want to say a word

to occasion you distress. But we have to be on our guard, you and I. One thing I should like to see—a reconciliation with your father.'

'He has written to me to go down to Porthcawl; it is the first letter I have received from him for months.'

'And you will go?'

'Oh, yes—but what good will come of it? You know my father, a hard man, stern in his sense of duty.'

'We are not any of us without faults,' said Snapper, and no part of the meaning of his words was lost upon Geoffrey Clavering. 'We must make allowances for one another, and I hope you will go to Porthcawl determined to be friends. A father has his rights, remember, as well as a son!'

'I will do all I can,' replied Clavering, pressing the hand which Snapper held out

to him. 'Unfortunately, I never can seem to get *near* my father, especially since that marriage. As for his wife, you cannot expect me to love her very much.'

'No, I do not ask that,' said Snapper, in a droll tone; 'she wastes no love on you either, I daresay. But she is your father's wife, and you must endeavour to keep clear of an open quarrel with her. When do you go down?'

'In a day or two.'

'You will find Edith there, and most likely Colonel Pendleton—he is about to rejoin her, I know.'

'How is it you never visit my father now?'

This time it was Clavering's turn to scrutinise his friend with curiosity.

'Well,' said Snapper, taking up his hat, 'I am going to pay my respects to Mrs. Clavering one of these days, never fear.'

But I am not ready just yet—my nerves are not in good order. She is a great talker, I hear, and very handsome; one ought to be at one's best to meet her. That is why I am waiting.'

There was a faint suspicion of a smile in Mr. Snapper's eyes rather than around his mouth as he said this, but young Clavering was evidently in doubt whether he spoke in jest or earnest.

'Let me know how you fare with your father,' were the Philadelphian's last words. 'As for Mrs. Clavering, we shall get on excellently well with her in due time.'

And thus, leaving the young man still rather puzzled, he took his departure.

CHAPTER V.

PORTHCAWL CASTLE.

ROLAND CLAVERING, Geoffrey's father, was a hard man, no doubt, and unbending in his sense of duty; but he was not altogether to blame for the differences which had grown up between himself and his son. Concealment and want of frankness were odious faults in the squire's eyes, and there was too much reason to believe that Geoffrey Clavering had been guilty of both. Many young men are so, and obtain forgiveness; but, when the second Mrs. Clavering appeared upon the scene, it soon

became clear that the harshness of the father's character was not likely to be softened.

He was at first disposed to give up everything to his wife; a year or two passed, and his confidence in her diminished. She, too, could conceal; perfect frankness was not the most marked peculiarity of her character. After a further interval, the squire saw her pretty nearly in her true light, and it was at this period that he secluded himself more than ever from the world, and seldom had a hearty welcome for anybody but Edith Pendleton. The purity of her nature, the guilelessness of her disposition, the sincerity of her affection, touched his heart. In her he saw all that he had hoped to find in wife and son; but the latter had disappointed him. There was something pathetic in

the utter confidence which he still reposed in the colonel's daughter; she restored his faith in human nature at a time when it was all but overthrown.

He was waiting for her now, as he paced up and down a lofty room, all the upper part of which was hidden in shadows. Occasionally he went to one of the windows and strained his eyes in the endeavour to catch the first glimpse of the young girl, for since she had gone out for her ride the weather had become wild and threatening. Far away on one side of the house there extended a sombre and leafless wood, in the midst of which stood a dismantled tower, the relic of the Porthcawl Castle of the Norman age. Below the window were the ancient terraces, gay with flowers in summer, but now lying cold and bare; and beyond there were the

huge rocks and boulders of the shore, and the wintry sea—dark, stormy, shrouded in mist.

As its sullen roar fell upon the ears of Roland Clavering, a slight shudder seemed to run through his frame—caused less, perhaps, by influences without than by those within. For he came of a superstitious race, and many a strange history was associated with its past. There was one legend which the Claverings put faith in, and which was known to have had an influence over their destinies. There were critical emergencies, so it was said, when some absent or departed member of the family had the power of returning to utter a warning of impending disaster, in such a way as to be seen and heard by all; after that, the mysterious messenger disappeared.

Roland Clavering had almost looked for such a warning of late; the dread of evil

was upon him, and he tried in vain to shake it off. Often during the last few months his thoughts had turned to his favourite brother, who was living amid a thousand perils on a vast *hacienda*, beyond the mountain ramparts of Mexico. Dark presentiments hang over us all at certain hours of the day or night, but they clung to Roland Clavering with a persistency which, in spite of himself, caused his spirit to falter.

He threw himself into a chair near the deep old fire-place, in which a score of men might have been packed away, and soon became so absorbed in the thoughts which crowded upon his mind that he did not hear the door open. When he looked up, his eyes rested upon a face and form which might well have scattered evil forebodings to the winds. A young girl stood before him in the bewitching charm and fresh-

ness of her first beauty. She was clad in a riding-habit, which revealed the outlines of her graceful figure, the glow of perfect health was on her cheeks, and her deep blue eyes, fringed with long dark lashes, were full of tenderness.

‘And you have come at last, Edith,’ said the squire, patting her head as if she were still a child. ‘You are wrong to stay out so late—what will your father say to me if I let anything happen to you?’

‘Nothing will happen—Dolly is safe enough anywhere, and the rain has only just come on. But you have not been well, my dear uncle,’—she had got into the way of calling him uncle—‘and you look sad. You have not heard any bad news?’

‘No news of any kind, my child. I am looking for your father every day; perhaps he is tired of us.’

‘He will be here very soon—as soon as he can get away from London. There was some business about his property in Virginia which detained him.’

‘Why does he not sell it and get done with it?’ asked the squire, rather testily.

‘Sell it? What! our home in Virginia? Papa will never do that. We intend to go and see it again some day, perhaps before long.’

‘And leave me?’

‘Not until Geoffrey is with you again, uncle.’

Her hand stole into his as he spoke, and she looked into his face with anxious entreaty.

‘It is well for Geoffrey that he has so staunch a champion,’ said the squire, after an ominous pause. ‘He does not seem to be particularly grateful for it.’

‘What do you mean, uncle?’

‘How long is it since he was here?’

This question seemed to silence the young girl. She shook her head and sighed.

‘You can scarcely tell,’ continued the squire, with a look which was rarely on his face when he spoke to Edith Pendleton. ‘He never writes to me, and he comes home about once a year. This, I suppose, is what people call a dutiful son. I am very glad that my friend the colonel has not a daughter of the same kind.’

‘But Geoffrey is not so bad as you think, believe me! He does not like to come here because he thinks you are offended with him.’

‘And yet you have been giving me no peace because I would not write and ask him to do us the favour to pay us a visit.’

‘But you *will* write, to please me.’

She came close to him again and took him by the hand. There was something in her look which melted the squire instantly.

‘Confess that you have your own way with me pretty much, Edith! I *have* written—will that content you?’

The young girl stooped over his chair and kissed his forehead.

‘But now,’ said the squire, relapsing into his old satirical tone, ‘suppose the young gentleman should not choose to come? Recollect that, after all, I am only his father, and he has given me no reason to suppose that my authority weighs much with him. How he spends his time, who are his companions, what are his aims in life—I know not.’

‘One of his companions is Mr. Snapper. You have nothing to say against him, uncle?’

‘Nothing, my dear, except that he, too, has deserted me. Why is that? No one will tell me.’

‘I believe it is because he does not like *me*,’ said Edith, demurely, and the squire smiled in spite of himself.

‘I thought the dislike was in another direction, perhaps—but we must let Mr. Snapper do what he thinks best. If I cannot induce my own son to return to Porthcawl Castle, how can I hope to prevail upon a comparative stranger?’

‘You do not quite understand Geoffrey,’ said the young girl, in a low, but firm voice. ‘It was a great grief to him to leave his home, only he could not tell you so—he was too proud. You are all proud, you Claverings—I have the same blood in me, you know, but when my pride is going to lead me into mischief I try to keep it down.’ (She had seated herself on the arm

of the squire's chair, and his hand was again resting on her head.) 'But all you people are made up of gunpowder—a spark touches you, and off you go.' (She threw up her arms in a comical way, and the squire began to laugh.) 'Sometimes I—even I!—am half afraid of you, sir, especially when you are sarcastic and have that hard look on your face. That is your *disinheriting* look; I suppose poor Geoffrey saw it, and he has scarcely dared to show himself here since. If you were to look at me in that way I should go back to Virginia to-morrow.'

She spoke in a half-playful, half-earnest tone, which amused and softened the squire.

'Then, depend upon it, you shall never see it, for if you were to go away from this house I would shut it up and spend the rest of my days abroad. There is nothing

much now to bind me to this country but your presence.'

The squire was evidently depressed, and the young girl noticed, not for the first time, that he looked weak and ill.

'You are forgetting all about Geoffrey again,' she said, gently.

'No—I have written very humbly to invite him here. Does that satisfy you?'

'It satisfies me so far as it goes, but what do you mean to say to him when he comes? Ah, you dare not tell me that!'

'You are worse than the grand inquisitor. Well, then, you must know that I intend to tell Geoffrey he ought to be very much obliged to Edith Pendleton for trying so hard to make peace. If Geoffrey does not appreciate you, his father does.'

'You will not be too severe with him?'

'Justice shall be tempered with mercy,'

said the squire, with mock gravity. 'There shall be no immediate execution.'

'I am very glad,' said Edith, half involuntarily, 'that Mrs. Clavering is not to be here when Geoffrey comes.'

'And why?' demanded the squire, with a sudden change in his tone.

'Because I do not think she likes to see him here. They do not get on well together—as we do, for instance. I think they never were friends.'

'And whose fault has it been,' exclaimed the squire, the gunpowder having caught. 'Entirely my son's. Mrs. Clavering has done him no wrong. She cannot stand in *his* way, and he knows it. Self-interest, therefore, has not excited his animosity. It pleased him to resent my marriage; probably because I did not ask his consent. You see,' he continued, with a bitter smile, 'I am not much encouraged to go

to him for advice, because he has given me no very lofty opinion of his prudence. Always in some difficulty—that is my experience of him. I have known as little of him or his doings during the last three years as if we had been strangers.’

‘There is nothing to know,’ Edith ventured to reply, although a great dread possessed her of doing more harm than good; ‘he lives so quietly in London, seeing scarcely anybody.’

‘How do you know that?’ asked the squire, with a penetrating glance.

‘Because Geoffrey tells me so. Oh, he tells me everything—we have no secrets from one another.’

‘I am delighted to hear it,’ said the squire to himself.

‘And I know that he is often very lonely and miserable,’ pursued Edith.

‘Probably; that is why he has so little desire to see us, Edith.’

‘Oh, but he has,’ she cried, eagerly; ‘he hides his true feelings from you, but not from me. You do not understand him, uncle—I am sure of it.’

‘And you do?’

‘I am certain I do,’ she replied, in the same earnest manner, carried away by her anxiety to plead her cause successfully.

She stopped, and looked in an odd, appealing manner to the squire.

‘Well,’ he said, moved either by her look or by some thought which passed through his mind, ‘we will hope that you are right. In any case, we shall soon hear what he has to say for himself.’

‘And you will not be hard with him?’

‘Anybody would think I was a man-

eater. Nobody shall injure him, if I can help it, while he is in this house. Have you ever found me so very terrible?’

The young girl put her arm through his and walked up and down the long room with him.

‘Dear uncle!’ she said, affectionately; ‘to me and to my father you have been only too kind. The first year my father came to England you gave up all your time to him, because he was so depressed. I remember it well, although I was but a child. What should we have done without you? My poor father felt so acutely all that had happened—I see *now* how much he suffered.’

‘But he is a brave man,’ said the squire, with an enthusiasm which he rarely displayed, ‘and he bore up bravely. At first, indeed, I was a little alarmed about him; his wound was painful, and would not

heal; and then there was the wound within, which was the more dangerous of the two! It is these inward wounds that smart the worst.'

He seemed to be falling back into the depression from which Edith had roused him only a little while before. This dejection, as well as the signs of ill-health, were not usual with the squire, and they alarmed the young girl. She made him go and resume his comfortable chair by the fire. In the course of the last few weeks, his figure had become bent, and he looked ten years older. All sorts of fears were in Edith's mind.

'This is a strange house, Edith,' said the squire, after a few moments' silence, 'and, when one is not well, queer fancies come trooping into the head. I think a good deal of that story we have of the kinsman who comes to warn the head of

the house when danger hangs over him.'

'But nothing of the kind has happened to you?' She went again and sat by his side and watched him intently.

'I hardly know what has happened,' he said, dreamily. 'Of late, my life has been a sort of blur. The other evening—in this room—I thought I saw one of my two surviving brothers, Claude. It was but for a moment, and of course it was an illusion. At any rate,' he continued, with a faint smile, 'there was no message.'

'Has there ever been a message of that kind?' said Edith, her curiosity a little excited.

'They say so,' said the squire, endeavouring to treat the matter lightly; 'my grandfather received the sign beyond a doubt, or *believed* he did—which I suppose comes to the same thing. I have often heard my own father speak of it. The

messenger may be a living person, but he comes unconsciously—ask the *real* person whether he recollects anything about it, and he will tell you he does not. My grandfather's brother came to him, but the brother was in France at the time, and, when he was told of the interview, he treated it with derision. Nevertheless, his warning came true.'

'It was of evil?'

'Oh, yes—that is one of the priceless privileges of our family. Nothing ever comes to tell us of any approaching good. But enough—we will talk no more of these things.'

'But do you believe in them, uncle?'

'I neither believe nor disbelieve; I am open to conviction. Mind you, I am not impatient to receive the mysterious warning. And while you are here, Edith, it will have no power to come! So that

you see a good deal depends upon you.'

'I wish it did—I know how I would arrange everything.'

'Well, you are getting your own way by degrees. Geoffrey will be here to-night, but not till late. I am very tired, and shall not sit up for him. Now, as you are a witch, able to make everybody do as you like, perhaps you will bring my Philadelphian friend, Mr. Rufus Snapper, back to us, and make the old house lively again?'

'He will come soon; he has promised me. He will not dare to break *that* promise.'

'I should think not,' said the squire, gravely. 'A pretty fate he would bring down upon himself if he did. Mr. Snapper is in mortal dread of you—not that there is anything remarkable in that. We are all under the spell.'

‘I fancy I hear Mrs. Clavering’s voice,’ said Edith, who was not quite free from the mischievousness of her sex.

The squire started, but immediately fell back again into his comfortable attitude.

‘I do not think we shall see her just now. She went yesterday to Birmingham. I have not heard of her return.’

‘What a curious place for her to visit!’

‘Very curious,’ said the squire, in a musing tone, ‘but I have discovered that my wife has a—a relation there, by a former marriage.’

‘Yes, I know,’ replied Edith, quickly, anxious to encourage the squire to go on.

He had hitherto been silent about that visit of Mr. Rafferty’s, although Edith knew all about it.

‘Ah, you know—then I need not tell you the story. Indeed, there is nothing to tell,’ he quickly added, noticing a shade

of disappointment on the young girl's face. 'Mrs. Clavering has a duty to perform in Birmingham, so she has convinced herself, and I daresay she is right. I have told her that she is free to perform it—and she goes when she pleases. I expect her back to-morrow.'

'So soon!'

'Well, it *is* rather soon,' replied the squire, diverted at his young friend's ingenuousness; 'but still, we must try to bear it. Perhaps she may have to go again before long—the claims upon her seem to get rather pressing. Relations are sometimes troublesome.'

'Especially a man like *that*!'

The squire looked up surprised. He thought the Rafferty episode had not become bruited about; but when was the penetration of servants ever at fault in

such a case? Little by little, Edith had heard the tale. This discovery might have annoyed the squire a few months ago ; now he viewed it with indifference.

‘Remember, my dear,’ he said, in slightly reproachful accents, ‘that the *man* is her *son* ! She has a right to stand by him. No doubt his faults are invisible to her eyes. Far better that it should be so, than that we should see too clearly—we who have sons.’

Edith Pendleton saw that there might be danger in following the squire into this train of thought, and she suddenly recollected that her riding-habit might be a little damp. The squire was all solicitude at once.

‘I forgot all about that rain,’ he said ; ‘how careless you were not to have reminded me before.’

In an instant he had set every bell within reach ringing, and, under cover of the din, Edith contrived to effect a judicious retreat.

CHAPTER VI.

A WELCOME HOME.

IT was late at night when Geoffrey Claver-
ing arrived at Porthcawl, but he had been
looked for with impatience by some of the
inmates.

‘Everybody well?’ he asked of the old
butler, who was at the door to receive
him.

‘Quite well, sir ; and we all hope that
you are so too. You will need some re-
freshments, sir, after your journey ; every-
thing is ready for you.’

‘I almost wonder you have not for-
gotten me, Pritchard.’

‘ Indeed, and it is a long time since you were here, sir, more’s the pity,’ said the old butler, with a sigh, as he led the way into the inner hall. ‘ We all miss you—your father most of all, as is but natural.’

‘ And he is well, you said ?’

‘ Not quite himself of late, sir ; I see a great change, and so I am afraid will you. Sometimes he does not leave the house for two or three days together. He seems so out of spirits, too ; I am sure it would do him good if you were to come and see him oftener. But I suppose you are very busy in London, sir.’

‘ Do not linger in that cold hall,’ broke in a voice of more silvery tones than poor old Pritchard’s.

When Geoffrey Clavering followed the direction of the sound, he found himself in the presence of Edith Pendleton, who

had been keeping a special vigil to welcome him.

‘I am so glad you have come, Geoffrey,’ she said, and her heightened colour and sparkling eyes more than confirmed her words. ‘And your father has been asking after you all the afternoon.’

‘Is he, then, so impatient to see me?’ replied the squire’s son, with what might easily have been recognised as a touch of his father’s half-satirical humour.

As he stood before the fire, where the light fell upon him, it was impossible not to observe that in feature and bearing he bore a strong resemblance to Roland Clavering. His figure was lithe and well-proportioned, his manner somewhat more courteous and graceful than that so much in vogue with the new generation.

‘It is a long time,’ he said, looking

round, 'since I was last here, and, so far as I can see, nothing has changed. We do not look for change at Porthcawl Castle.'

'No—we go away for that, and stay away.'

Geoffrey smiled at this little shaft.

'I admit that I stay away, but *you* know, Edith, that I cannot help myself. How was I to live in the house with that woman? Is she here, by-the-by? I would have written to ask you, but I knew that in any case you would wish me to obey my father's summons.'

'And so you were guided by my wishes?'

They were both standing by the fire, and young Clavering was convinced that he had never seen the colonel's daughter looking so charming before. There was a suspicion of raillery in her tone which piqued him.

‘I am always guided by your wishes,’ he said, with a serious air, ‘when circumstances are not too strong for me.’

‘I thought man was made to overcome circumstances.’

‘So I believe he was; but sometimes they overcome him just the same. But about Mrs. Clavering?’

‘Well, what about her?’

‘Don’t be provoking! Is she here?’

‘She is not; she has gone away on a visit, to Birmingham of all places in the world. The air is so refreshing there. I wonder what is the *other* attraction?’ This question she put merely to try the squire’s son.

‘It does not matter, so long as it keeps her in Birmingham. Now tell me something about yourself,’ he said, in a gentler voice. ‘Do you know how long ago it is since you wrote to me? Are they

trying to make *us* strangers, too, Edith?’

‘No one is so wicked,’ said the young girl, with a slight laugh; ‘but, if you are anxious for news from us, why do you not come and get it? Your father says you do not care for us, and do not want us to care for you. I am afraid he is right.’

‘That is what he says? A charitable judgment, as usual.’

‘I do not see what other he can form,’ said Edith, with real or assumed gravity.

‘“*Les absents ont toujours tort.*” Still I thought there was one person in this house that was not likely to go against me.’

‘You mean Mrs. Clavering?’ said Edith, with apparent simplicity.

‘And so that is the only friend you will assign to me?’ He came and stood a little nearer to her, and there was a look in her eyes which showed him how little importance he need attach to her words. He

seemed to be quite satisfied. ‘Come now,’ he said, with a more cheerful aspect, ‘let me hear something more about my only friend. Is Mrs. Clavering often absent in this way?’

‘Often of late; at first your father seemed a good deal disturbed by it; now I think he scarcely notices when she goes or when she returns. But then there is scarcely anything that he cares for as he used to do.’

‘Surely, you!’

‘Yes—he is the same as ever to me;’ and the tears came into her eyes. ‘But certainly his energies are failing, and it is very lonely for him. Mrs. Clavering finds it a little too dull for *her*; we have had only one visitor in ten days, and that was the old vicar. Old vicars are not much in Mrs. Clavering’s line, I think.’

‘And so she leaves them in possession of

the field. And my father does not mind it?’

‘So it seems. I am with him a great deal, and he seldom speaks to me about her. I told you about the visit of that strange man, who called himself her son. That made a great difference in the squire. Mrs. Clavering had always told him her son was in America, and the squire has found out that he was in England all the time. He never trusts anybody who has once deceived him.’

‘Come and sit with me a few minutes while I get something to eat,’ said young Clavering, who had been made a little uneasy by the last remark, and Edith noticed it—not without surprise. She went with him into an adjoining room, where Pritchard had everything in readiness.

‘Mrs. Clavering ought to have been frank with the squire,’ said the colonel’s

daughter, when they were again alone. 'Had she told him all, he would not have been angry. It is the best way to deal with him.'

'I suppose it is,' returned Geoffrey, a little restlessly.

'And it is the honourable course. Is it not a shame to lead him to believe a falsehood?'

'Well, go on with your story, Edith,' responded Clavering, whose appetite seemed to be gone. 'They have not been so much together of late?'

'Very little. And, except for the pain that this affair caused your father, I wish very much that this Mr. Rafferty would come again.'

Geoffrey laughed once more.

'Mother and son,' he said, 'are alike too clever for that. There must have been some accident about the last business;

depend upon it, *she* did not plan it to come off like that. The first appearance of "my son" at Porthcawl was designed as a great dramatic *coup*, to make his fortune and overwhelm me. If the fellow had been sober, I daresay he would have played his part a little better.'

'At any rate,' said Edith, triumphantly, for she was as angry at the insolence of Rafferty as she could be about anything, 'he has not dared to come here again, at least not *inside* the house. As for what goes on outside, I am not quite sure. The servants will talk, and they all dislike Mrs. Clavering.'

'What a very sensible set of people!'

'And they say that she has been seen with her son in the park. But, remember, you must not repeat a word of this to anybody—it might do harm! Now let me tell you a great secret.' (Geoffrey drew a

couple of chairs before the fire, and sat very near to her, so that the secret should reach his ears alone.) ‘Before that visit—that is, before your father knew that he had been deceived—she led him to make a new will.’

‘How do you know that?’ asked the squire’s son, rather startled.

‘Because Mr. Smiles, the lawyer, came here several times, and once he said to me, “I wish Geoffrey Clavering were here. It is high time he came, if he only knew his own interests.” I wrote to you, but of course you did not come. On his last visit, Mr. Smiles seemed a little better pleased, because, I fancy, the will was not signed. Mrs. Clavering was very anxious about it, and I suppose she had her reasons for being so. Pritchard knew that it was your father’s will which Mr. Smiles brought, and he told me all about it the next day.

He was frightened, and thought the squire was about to die. You know he had been ill just before that.'

'And you have been keeping watch on all these manœuvres, for my sake?'

'What a dreadful thing it would be if that woman had her own way,' said Edith, taking no notice of his remark, and speaking with apparent anxiety. 'Sometimes I am afraid she will get it—she is very clever, and there is only a poor, inexperienced girl to oppose her. Why do you not come back, Geoffrey, and take your own part?'

'You know that I cannot help myself just now—we have often talked about that. It is that woman's daily intercourse with you that I am most anxious to prevent. She cannot do me any great harm.'

'Our intercourse is very limited. We

say good-morning and good-night, that is all. But I do not like to see her victorious. She wanted to get you away from here, and you went. Then she tried to get rid of me, but I knew it and would not go. Now my father wants me to go abroad with him, and I suppose the squire must be left alone—with her!’

There was a brief silence, and the young man seemed plunged in thought.

‘How cold this room always is,’ he said, presently, with a shiver. ‘It is always cold. I wonder Pritchard put me in here—it is where they found the skeletons under the floor.’

‘I know it,’ said Edith Pendleton, looking round with a ludicrous affectation of alarm; ‘none of the maids will come near this passage after dark except in couples. But I rather like the room; one is sure of never being disturbed in it. I have never

seen anything more ghostly than that portrait in the corner.'

She pointed to the picture of a stern, almost sinister-looking man, who was pointing downwards to the floor. It was a Clavering of the time of the Wars of the Roses, and the legend was that he had entrapped two of his own relations into this very room and caused them to be killed. There was a fierce and sanguinary expression in the face which instantly struck all who looked upon it. A new flooring had been laid, and, in carrying out the work, the men came upon two skeletons, but how long they had been there was never found out.

'I wish there were never anybody worse in the house than my wicked ancestor,' said young Clavering, carelessly. 'By the way, they say that when there is anybody here of whom he disapproves, he visits

them at night in appalling shapes until they go mad. But Mrs. Clavering has not gone mad, so there can be nothing in that story. I hope he approves of you and me, Edith.'

'Be serious, Geoffrey!'

'I am—very serious. There is enough to make one so in this house. There are but two left of the old stock, my father and I. See on what terms we are! If it were not for you I should scarcely have ventured to come here again.'

He took her hand for a moment and bent over it, slightly touching it with his lips. Edith could see that he was not a little moved.

'I am a very helpless creature,' said she, sorrowfully; 'see how long and how hard I have been trying to make you and your father friends, and to bring you back to your home. Yet, to-day, we are all just

where we were—no good has been done. Now, if it had been Mrs. Clavering who had set her heart upon this she would have succeeded. I feel very much ashamed of myself.'

'Edith!' said the squire's son, with great feeling. 'You must not talk of yourself like this. But for you, everything would have been ten times worse. I should have given up in despair long ago.'

'But why?' She looked up at him in genuine surprise.

'Because of all the difficulties of my position. Think of this wretched state of affairs with my father!'

'But if you would only come back, I am sure he would relent even now!'

'Relent!' repeated the squire's son, firing up. 'What cause has he for anger? What harm have I done?'

'Is your conscience, then, so entirely clear, Geoffrey?'

It was almost an accidental question; certainly there was no hidden meaning in it, but it seemed to strike young Clavering like a bullet. For a moment or two he stood confused, almost dismayed.

‘What have they been telling you about me? Who has dared to come here poisoning *your* mind as well as my father’s?’

‘No one,’ replied the young girl, astonished; ‘how strangely you look, Geoffrey! Why are you so agitated?’

‘Is it not enough to agitate one to think of the tales that may have reached you?’

‘Why should it? You do not suppose we should believe anyone who sought to do you harm? When a person’s life is blameless, why should he fear?’

‘Ah, that is all very well,’ he said, with some appearance of impatience, ‘but no one can go through life without making

mistakes.' He looked at his old companion strangely, and a sudden outburst of feeling seemed to master him. 'I only wish,' he said, 'that I could have been guided by you from the day I quitted my home! All might have been different now.'

'What do you mean, Geoffrey?' she asked, with an unwonted tremor at her heart. 'What has happened to make you speak and look like this?' Then seeing that he was silent, and had averted his head, she put her hand upon his arm, and appealed to him. 'If you are in any trouble—if there is anything that can be done—why do you not tell me? Have we not always been true friends?'

'There is nothing,' said Clavering, shaking off his depression with a manifest effort. 'Do not exaggerate. I wish I had never left *you*—there is nothing surprising in that. You must not get idle fancies

into your head about me. The fact is, I have not been very well lately; all these bothers at home upset me. Never mind about me,' he continued, with more vivacity. 'Tell me about my father. Is he really breaking as much as old Pritchard says?'

'I fear so,' replied Edith, not at all reassured, yet unwilling to question him any further. 'I wish he would see the doctor, but he always refuses. He frets a good deal, and yet when my father comes to see us, he soon recovers his spirits. See how late it is!' she added, with a quick glance at the clock. 'I suppose I ought not to have sat up, but it seemed hard that you should come back without a word of welcome.'

'You are not angry with me, Edith?' He fixed his eyes anxiously upon her face as he spoke.

‘Oh, no—why should I be? But there must be no mysteries between *us*. If you cannot trust me, it is hard indeed. You must tell me everything—do you understand?’

He looked tenderly after her as she retired, and then he returned to his chair, and said half aloud :

‘Tell her all! I wish to heaven I could! Perhaps I had better begin to-morrow with my father; I might try that first as an experiment.’

And, late as it was, this thought, or some other that filled his mind, kept him brooding till the last spark of fire was extinguished, and all the house was silent.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND HEIR.

THE first greeting between the squire and his son was constrained, and to the eyes of Edith Pendleton, who was in the breakfast-room when they met, the coolness between them seemed to have increased rather than diminished. At young Clavering's last visit, the squire had talked freely with him on all sorts of subjects ; now he was preoccupied and reserved. When he retired to the library, he invited the younger man to follow him, and the hard tone in which he spoke almost destroyed in Edith's mind the last remnant of her hopes.

‘Well,’ said the squire, when he and Geoffrey were alone, ‘you have at last done us the honour to pay us another visit. It is most kind of you, for naturally your engagements in London are very pressing?’

‘If I have not been here so often as I should like, I hope you will not blame me,’ replied the son, too readily echoing the squire’s tone.

There was an old saying that two Claverings, father and son, ought never to be shut up in a room together.

‘Pray, whom should I blame, then? Apparently you think that I have no right to know anything whatever about your life; it is months since we have heard from you.’

‘Recollect, sir, how many letters of mine still remain unanswered.’

‘I recollect them,’ remarked the squire,

pointing to a little packet which lay upon the table. 'There they are, truly filial epistles; complaints of inadequate allowance, allusions to debts, hints of difficulties which I have not been able to comprehend, even with the aid of my lawyer, Mr. Smiles.'

'I was not aware that he had been interesting himself in me.'

'At my request; and thus far I cannot say that he has added much to my meagre stock of information.' The son's face brightened a little for a moment, and the squire's keen glance instantly detected the change. 'Mr. Smiles,' he continued, 'is a discreet man, and does not meddle in affairs which do not immediately concern him. I daresay he looks upon your private difficulties—whatever they may be—as beyond his province. I gave him no instructions to enquire into them.'

‘I thank you for your consideration, sir.’

‘Just so—consideration for others, as well as for you.’ The squire uttered these words in a significant tone, and the son understood him at once. ‘But now you can fill up the gaps yourself. We may never have a more favourable opportunity.’

He sat down in his leisurely way, and seemed to indicate that he expected to hear some important disclosures.

‘What do you wish me to tell you, sir?’

The younger man was already chafing slightly.

‘As for that—anything you deem likely to interest me. I am entirely at your disposal this morning. Let us have such fragments of autobiography as it may seem fitting to you that your father should

be made acquainted with. The omissions even then will perhaps be considerable.'

'I am afraid there must be some. I was very young when I was practically driven from my home, and I had little knowledge of the world. It would have been strange if I had made no blunders.'

'Then you really have made blunders?'

'Undoubtedly; we all have.'

'Let us leave the rest of the universe out of consideration for the moment, and deal only with yourself. The subject seems to be wide enough!'

'I am afraid it is, sir.'

'Well, do not assume so despondent an air. Your debts I know about; is there anything else?'

'I do not think there is anything I need trouble you with,' said young Clavering, drawing more and more within himself, under the influence of his father's half-

sarcastic manner. 'If I have done anything wrong, I suppose I shall have to suffer for it.'

'Come! That is an answer worthy of a son in a melodrama. It is better, as a rule, to keep stage mysteries for the stage. By-the-by, is your secret—for there seems to be one—connected with the stage? You know what I mean?'

'Perfectly. There is nothing of that kind,' replied the son, with an angry flush.

'Well, do not get indignant about it. All sorts of things happen to young men who prefer anybody's home to their father's. Even we who live so much out of the world hear of the delightful things that go on in it. So your difficulties do not spring from the drama?'

'There is nothing of the kind,' repeated the son, rather doggedly.

‘No love, and no marriage? One never knows what may happen. There are various kinds of marriages.’

‘There are,’ said the son, quickly, and with a touch of sarcasm which evidently did not please the squire, although it was much in his own style.

‘What am I to infer from that remark? That you have acquired experience in that field also?’

‘No, sir; I merely meant that your own marriage has been punishment enough for me.’

‘Meaning my second marriage, I presume?’

The squire’s voice was calm, but inwardly he began to grow warm.

‘It was a marriage which involved many misfortunes—among them, it lost me my father’s confidence and affection.’

‘That you appear to have keenly felt.

You have been to see me once or twice in four years ; and even now I cannot detect much of the prodigal son in your tone or manner. You have taxed me heavily to pay your debts, and I will always say this for you—you refrain from overwhelming me with gratitude. But that, I suppose, is a way which you have of showing your good feeling. And for the same reason, doubtless, you are pleased to sneer at a lady who is entitled to your respect, if nothing more.'

'I know of but one lady in this house who is entitled to my respect,' said the young man, firmly.

'And pray to whom do you refer?'

'You may easily guess, sir,—to Edith Pendleton.'

The squire's countenance changed ; the son saw that for the moment he was quite disarmed.

‘It is true,’ he said, ‘that Edith—Miss Pendleton—has brought a blessing to this house. It would be strange if I were less ready to acknowledge it than you! I could even add much to what you have said—she might have taught you your duty had you been willing to learn it. Well would it have been for all of us if your character had resembled hers! But I will not blame you because you are not gifted with a nature which belongs to creatures of a finer mould than we are made of, you and I. If it is to praise Edith Pendleton that you have come, your mission is accomplished. We agree entirely. Pray, have you but just found out her merits?’

‘Not at all—but you forget that when I was with her most, I was a mere lad. When I went from home, she was little more than fourteen. If I did not under-

stand her then as I do now it is not surprising. After I went away, she seemed for some time to have forgotten me, and before I saw her again, I had——'

'You had what?' said the squire, seeing that his son came to a sudden pause.

'I had become a stranger to her—and to you. My place was gone.'

But somehow the father felt that this was not what his son had at first intended to say. He looked at him searchingly for a moment, and then he seemed immersed in his own thoughts.

'You see Miss Pendleton in London, when she is there with Colonel Pendleton,' said the squire, after an interval which seemed long to both.

'Not so often as I should wish—but still I see her.'

'Very good; and you are friends?'

‘Decidedly. I am well aware how faithfully she has stood by me.’

‘You cannot be too grateful to her for her kindness. It is at least satisfactory that you recognize that. I wish I could think that all your acquaintance had been like her—or that none were unworthy of her.’

‘You have yourself said that few women are like Edith, and I believe it. I have cause to know it too well.’

‘These allusions to my wife may seem to you very clever,’ said the father, in sharp accents, ‘but they are not seemly. Reserve them for your own private amusement.’

The son looked up surprised, for no such allusion had been in his thoughts. This unusual sensitiveness to real or imaginary references to his wife seemed to

be a new feature in the squire's character.

‘I was not thinking of Mrs. Clavering,’ said Geoffrey, frankly. ‘And depend upon it I did not come here with any purpose of offending you.’

‘Pray, may I ask, sir, in what school have you been acquiring this wonderful experience of which you have spoken?’

‘In a school which I have no desire to see again. But I need not trouble you about that, sir. I have come here in accordance with your desire, but I do not know that it is worth while to take up your time with my affairs.’

‘And yet I do not know that there is anyone to whom your affairs are likely to be more interesting than your father. Do you?’ The squire looked at his son steadily for a moment or two, but there was no reply. Then he went on, ‘The truth is, it is about yourself that I wished to talk to

you. Let us begin at the beginning. When do you propose to return to your home?’

The son hesitated, and seemed more uneasy than he had been at any time during the conversation. Yet, as his father reminded him, the question was not unnatural or in itself alarming.

‘I confess,’ he said at length, ‘that I have not been thinking of taking any such step. I think, sir, that Mrs. Clavering would rather I did not.’

‘We will leave my wife out of the question for the moment,’ said the squire, with an icy smile. ‘Put the matter to yourself in another way. How must your conduct appear, think you, to Edith Pendleton, whose good opinion you profess to value so highly? Are you sure that you are not forfeiting her esteem as well as mine?’

‘I am *not* sure that I understand you,’

replied Geoffrey, far less unmoved in reality than his manner indicated.

‘Yet it is very simple. You profess to prize Edith’s esteem—how is it, then, that you are so careful to keep from the house which contains her? There must be some overpowering attraction elsewhere. Do you suppose that Miss Pendleton has no such thought crossing her mind?’

‘She understands my motives, and I think she approves of them.’

‘I doubt it very much; you seem to think that events can be controlled by your own wishes. You deceive yourself about Edith—unless, indeed,’ added the squire, as a sudden thought struck him and gave to his face a kindlier look than it had yet worn, ‘unless you have a better understanding with her than I am aware of. Is that the case? I will tell you

candidly that I should be gratified to hear that it is so.'

'There is no understanding between us—except that which makes us friends,' replied the son, divining his father's meaning, but striving to hide the fact.

He rose from his chair, and walked about the room with restless steps.

'I beg you to sit down,' said the squire; 'I have been nervous of late, and your movements disturb me. This understanding with Miss Edith—it is, then, purely formal, as one may say?'

'Purely friendly, sir.'

'The same thing. And you mean to say that you have no desire to place it on a different footing?'

'How can I? My path lies apart from hers.'

'Does it really?' said the squire, relaps-

ing into his cold and ironical mood. 'Then I should be disposed to regard that as a disaster for you. Any man who gained Miss Pendleton's affection would have reason to esteem himself fortunate. But it seems that your path lies apart from hers. And you are quite contented to have it so. How do you explain that?'

'I have no explanation to offer, sir,' replied the son.

He now saw why his father had sent for him, and he was taken completely by surprise. Scarcely knowing how to meet this unexpected emergency, he took refuge in silence, which his father interpreted as dogged obstinacy.

'So much,' said the squire, in mingled anger and disappointment, 'for all my hopes and plans. They go the way of most of the others which I had formed for you. I do not know much about what

you call your "path," but it seems to me that you had better pursue it alone.'

'I fear I must, indeed,' rejoined the young man, bitterly.

'So be it. We need not, then, go any further into that autobiography of yours. Do not complain again, as you have complained, of neglect. Blame yourself only—and now it seems to me that this is all we can have to say to one another, unless you will honour us by joining us at dinner. There will be no one here but Mrs. Clavering, whose return I am expecting every moment.'

'Thank you; I will not trespass on your kindness.'

'Consult your own convenience entirely. Good-bye.' He held out his hand much as he might have done to a passing acquaintance, and the son turned quickly from the room. His first impulse was to quit the

house at once, but he felt that he must say a few words to Edith Pendleton first. And yet how could he tell her the real cause of this new difference with his father? That was impossible. Perhaps he had created in the mind of the squire the impression that he was indifferent to Edith's future. The truth was exactly the other way, and yet he had not avowed it. Remorse was mingled with sadness as he took her hand. Never had the subtle influence which her very presence exercised over him moved him so powerfully. They stood looking at each other a moment, and then by an irresistible impulse he drew her towards him, and kissed her—for the first time since they were children.

‘All has gone badly,’ he said, and the smile faded out of the young girl's face. She was more disheartened than she dared to reveal.

‘What has happened?’ she asked, nervously.

‘I can scarcely tell—from the first moment we seemed to get to cross purposes, as usual. He taunted me, and I fell into a sullen fit, I suppose. At any rate, I am going—he gave me my *congé* very unmistakably. *We* must be friends, Edith, happen what may. Something will arise yet to sweep away my difficulties, and then you will let me come to you and tell you all!’

‘Why, what is there to tell? You cannot make me afraid, Geoffrey, because I am sure you have done nothing wrong. Do not go in this haste! Your father will ask for you presently, and forget his anger.’

‘He will not; you do not yet know him so well as I do.’

‘Why did you quarrel—what was it about?’

‘Anything—everything. But, remember, Edith, that, whether I am here or in London, I am always thinking of you. Do not think harshly of me, whatever you may hear. This woman—my father’s wife—is vindictive, and can be dangerous. She will tell you——’

‘What does it matter, since I have perfect trust in you,’ she said, but she could not help noticing how often he came round to this same point again. Some one might seek to injure him in her estimation!

‘And you are really going to-day?’ she said, sorrowfully.

‘At once—it is better so. It seems that very little of my life, Edith, really belongs to me; the fates have taken it into their own hands, and I do not think much of

their management. But I shall see you soon again, for your father has promised to bring you to London. London is tolerable to me only when you are there.'

'I hope it is so,' said the young girl, as if to herself.

'Do not doubt it! For the last two years, I have felt all my hopes and wishes centre in you. Some day I will try to make myself worthy of you! Try to believe that also--and now, good-bye!' He took her hand, and for a few moments all care and trouble passed from the minds of both.

The squire's son looked back when he reached the door. Edith Pendleton was still standing where he left her, but there was a look upon her face which nerved him to go on his way. And yet, it was because he would not acknowledge to his father his love for Edith that his visit had

been a failure ! He did not conceal this from himself, although he concealed it from her.

Why he had acted thus he knew well enough ; it did not arise from the accidental freak of a moment. He strode on through the park, brooding on all the circumstances of his position, when he was aroused from his dreams by a carriage passing swiftly, and so closely that a slight spatter of mud from the wheels fell upon his face. He looked up, and glanced with some irritation at the person within the vehicle—a lady, half-buried in heavy furs. The very sight of her seemed to him at such a moment an omen of evil.

It was Mrs. Clavering. She had recognised him, but when, on her return to the house, her husband made no allusion to the visit, she on her part held her peace. The squire's silence alone told her all she

cared to know. But with Edith she felt no compulsion to be upon her guard. During the afternoon she found an opportunity of unburdening her mind.

‘Geoffrey Clavering has been here, Edith,’ she began, in her pleasantest tones — ‘and of course you saw him?’

Edith merely gave a look of surprise at the question; she was not quite certain what motive the squire’s wife had for thus suddenly adverting to the visit, but what had passed between her and Geoffrey somehow made her feel very resolute and brave.

‘He has left his father all unhinged and depressed—as usual, one may say. Do you know what happened during his visit?’

‘They did not invite me to be present at their interview,’ said Edith. ‘Why do you not ask my uncle?’

‘Geoffrey must have gone away very suddenly,’ continued the elder lady, as if wondering much at the cause. ‘Why was that? And he was not in a very amiable mood, I fear. I saw him hurrying along, with his head bent down, as we entered the park. We are some distance from the railway, as you know, and the rain was beginning to fall. He would not be driven to the station, it seems—told the servants he would walk. And walk he did, no doubt, all the long five or six miles. Really, I felt sorry for him; certainly he was not happy. Now I think of it, I am not surprised that he looked so gloomy and morose. At such moments, of course everything must go wrong. To tell you the truth, the barouche nearly ran over him.’

‘Your barouche! Nearly ran over Geoffrey!’

There was a touch of half-amused scorn in Edith's voice against which Mrs. Clavering was by no means proof. In spite of her skill and experience, there were few things which overthrew her composure so soon as this young girl's contempt.

'That is precisely what occurred,' she said, with her pleasant smile. 'We could not help it. . You know how awkward it is when anyone is rushing along the road without looking where he is going. There might have been a terrible accident.'

'The carriage upset, do you mean?' said Edith, now completely herself.

'No, but the young gentleman killed, and he really looked at me as fiercely as if I had tried to do it. But I have no wish to kill him—I hope he knows that.'

'I will tell him ; he will be delighted.'

'What is more,' continued Mrs. Clavering, 'I wish he had chosen to remain here

for a day or two. It does not look very well for the only son to be continually absent from his home. It would cause talk, only that there is not anybody within ten miles of us to know or care what goes on. It cannot be well, I should think, for a young gentleman in his position to be living alone in London; but that, I suppose, is his own affair.'

'He seems to think it is. Why have you never tried to convince him he is wrong?'

'How could I hope to succeed, my dear, where you have failed? No, no, I am too prudent for that. Well, now, at any rate this visit is over, and we may hope that your uncle will have a little peace. Have you seen him since his son was here?'

'Was I not at luncheon?'

‘To be sure—I had forgotten. Then you must have noticed how much he was disturbed; how silent he was, how unlike what he used to be.’

‘Indeed, we have all noticed that—but not to-day for the first time.’

‘That he has altered much of late? Yes, I see it too; I understand that even the servants talk about it. You must remember that Mr. Clavering does not grow younger or stronger. So much the more reason is there for sparing him all the pain and annoyance that we possibly can. Now this affair to-day—it has thoroughly unnerved him. I have not seen him so put out since—since—well, really I cannot recall the time.’

‘Let me help you,’ said Edith, innocently. ‘He was more put out, as you call it, after that other visit he had some time

ago. You cannot quite have forgotten that?’

Mrs. Clavering had great command over her features, but she could not always control her hands. Their restlessness now showed that she was not so thoroughly at her ease as her pleasant smile might have led a looker-on to suppose.

‘I am afraid I cannot assist you in your recollections,’ said she, coolly. ‘Perhaps you will complete them for my benefit.’

‘Oh, there will be no difficulty—the incident will come back to you in a moment. The other visitor who troubled my uncle so much was that very odd-looking man, who forced himself into the house, and acted so strangely. I am sure he was more difficult to manage than poor Geoffrey, for he at any rate is always—’ sober, Edith was going to say, but she restrained herself—‘always perfectly quiet and well-

behaved. But they said in the house that this person was not like that—not by any means.’

‘Whom do you mean?’

Although the question was asked in a firm voice, Mrs. Clavering was more disturbed than she would willingly have acknowledged, for until now she believed that the ill-starred appearance of her son at Porthcawl was not known to Edith Pendleton. But her confusion was little more than momentary; it never cost her any effort to summon up a bold front.

‘You do not remember?’ said Edith, ‘well, that is strange. It was that person who was insolent to my uncle, and who came demanding to see you. His name—what was his name?—it is so difficult to recall the names of such people. Now I have it—Samuel Rafferty, a gentleman from Birmingham, said the servants. You

go to Birmingham sometimes, perhaps you know him ?’

Mrs. Clavering assumed a look of sorrowful dignity, and swept out of the room, leaving for once the field and the honours of war with her young antagonist.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. SNAPPER AT PORTHCAWL.

AFTER the departure of his son, the squire secluded himself more than ever, and it soon became evident to the person in the house who loved him best—Edith Pendleton—that his health was rapidly failing. She sat with him for several hours during the day, reading or talking, and gradually the conviction took a firmer hold upon her that the squire's illness did not arise entirely from natural causes. It was a terrible suspicion, but the more she observed and reflected, the harder was it to dismiss it

from her mind. She could not refrain from letting a hint of it appear in a letter to her father, and she also dwelt much upon the state to which his old friend had become reduced.

Colonel Pendleton read this letter with some concern; and he not only made instant arrangements to go down to Porthcawl Castle, but prevailed upon Mr. Rufus Snapper to accompany him. There was the less difficulty in managing this since Mr. Snapper had privately made up his mind that the time had come when it was his duty to renew his acquaintance with the lady whom he remembered best as Polly Rafferty.

After the disappearance of his former cashier, Peter Rafferty, the lady had called upon Mr. Snapper to see what could be done with him. She had at that time a very girlish appearance, and a soft, shy

look, such as would have well become Eve before the fall. She was very timid when Mr. Snapper received her—trembled a little, and blushed, but was not too much confused to watch the effect she was producing.

She gave a pathetic account of her own life, which was none the less striking because it happened to be composed entirely on the spur of the moment; she cried a little, and would have cried a great deal, only that she saw unequivocal signs that she might as well pour water upon a duck's back, as shed tears before Rufus Snapper; therefore she changed her tack, and assailed her husband freely. Before starting out on her errand, she had taken care to choose a dress which displayed her figure to the best advantage, and she got ready the whole battery which she had found most destructive in her previous dealings with

mankind. She did justice to herself—no one could deny that; and the end of it was—utter failure. The iron-clad Philadelphian showed not the slightest trace of having been in action. He nodded gravely now and then when he was directly appealed to, and once when Mrs. Rafferty felt very faint—or began to look as if she had made up her mind to feel faint—Snapper's hand was suddenly extended, not towards her, as she fully anticipated, but towards the bell.

‘What sort of a man is he, anyhow?’ she said to herself, anger and mortification in her heart.

Seeing that the game was hopeless, she dried her eyes, which were not very wet, and took her leave, and rejoiced greatly to think that Peter Rafferty had helped himself so freely to Snapper's money, and that she had enjoyed her full share of it.

On his way to Porthcawl, all these things, and many more, came back to Snapper's recollection, and it was with some curiosity that he speculated on the nature of the reception he was likely to meet with from the squire's wife. It turned out to be not at all like that which he had anticipated. He had looked for a cold and distant greeting, whereas Mrs. Clavering received him, as it were, with open arms; no friend of a life-time could have had a warmer welcome.

‘Of course I recollect you now,’ she said, with every sign of true pleasure; ‘how glad I am to see you here! Your name I had forgotten; but I do not forget *you*. It is so much easier to remember faces than names. After dinner we will have a little talk over old times and old friends.’

Her self-possession was almost too much for Snapper.

‘ Old friends !’ thought he. ‘ Why, she must mean her former husband, Peter. But he’s dead—she can’t have heard anything from him lately. I never saw a human being of her acquaintance except Peter. What on earth can she want to talk about him to *me* for? Ah, here is Edith.’

It was curious to notice the change which passed over his face as the colonel’s daughter entered the room. The hard look about his eyes, the firm lines round the mouth, softened down as if by magic. A gentle tone was suddenly imparted even to his voice as he greeted her, and for a moment or two he was silent, holding her hand in his own. Mrs. Clavering watched them attentively, and then she gathered up a bundle of letters from her writing-table.

‘ I think,’ she said, ‘ that Miss Pendleton

shall give you your tea, Mr. Snapper, and we will have our talk another time. Will you let it be so? I must answer some of these letters by to-night's post;' and she held them up that he might see they were really letters.

Snapper bowed, and as Mrs. Clavering passed from the room he and Edith exchanged one expressive look, but for the moment neither of them made an allusion to her.

'Fancy your actually having come all this way to see me,' said Edith, as she made him take a chair by her side. 'I declare I can scarcely believe it, although you are before my eyes.'

'Did I say I had come to see you?'

'Do not dare to tell me you have come to see anyone else! To be sure, there is Mrs. Clavering. Perhaps your visit is for her. And, now I think of it,' she added,

with a little start at the sudden recollection of the fact, 'the mention of your name produced a strange effect upon her when she first heard it. I wish I had seen you when you met! What did she do?'

'Do? Nothing—what could she do? Am I not getting old? Ladies do nothing to me now, except sometimes give me a cup of tea. And that is more than I seem likely to get from you.'

Edith had, in fact, forgotten her business at that moment. She was satisfied that something was going on in her friend's mind which she did not quite understand, and she was trying to read his countenance, as she told herself. But there was nothing written there.

'You mean to say that you keep a secret from me, Mr. Snapper?' she said, disappointed with the result of her scrutiny.

‘I mean to say that I should not venture to do anything of the sort,’ replied Snapper, with mock seriousness. ‘That is not the compact between us. We are to have no secrets from one another. So now, to prove that you are in earnest, out with all yours to begin with.’

‘And what about this lady to whom they say you are going to be married?’ she asked, in reproachful accents.

‘I hope you will like her—at least, as well as you do the lady of this house. Is it because Mrs. Clavering and you are so fond of each other that you live in this old place so long?’

‘You may well call it an old place,’ said Edith, avoiding for some reason the main question. ‘Did you notice the drawbridge as you came in? But that is nothing. Come here and look down this passage.’

She rose as she spoke, and opened a door leading from the room in which they were sitting. It led into a dark corridor which had a very bad reputation among the servants. It was supposed to be the liveliest place in the house—after midnight.

Snapper peered down the dark passage, and put his hands upon the rough stone walls to see if they were real. At first he treated it as a joke; then he grew more serious, for the spirit of the place began to enter into him. No one at Porthcawl could altogether resist its influence, especially as the evening shadows lengthened.

‘Go down the passage and see where it leads to,’ said the colonel’s daughter, giving him a little push.

‘I am afraid to go by myself,’ replied Snapper; ‘I don’t like these dark places.’ Then he took the young girl’s hand, and

drew her gently with him. 'Now it seems neither so cold nor so dark as I thought it was at first. But there's something queer about it. Where did you say the passage leads to?'

'To the priest's chambers.'

'What, are there priests here, too? Well, that beats all. I never knew that madame was a Catholic before. She wasn't much of a Catholic in Peter's time.'

'And pray who was Peter?' asked Edith, quickly, as they stepped back into the room. 'And what had he to do with Mrs. Clavering?'

'Did I say anything about Peter?' said Snapper, looking mystified.

'To be sure you did! Now, tell me the whole truth, and do not stand there trying to deceive me. Who was Peter?'

'I suppose I must have been thinking of Saint Peter; we were talking about

priests and Catholics, that must have put him into my head. Saint Peter with the keys, you know—and a pretty free use he made of those same keys at my expense,’ added Snapper, *sotto voce*.

‘What are you muttering about keys?’ asked Edith, looking very hard at Snapper, and shaking her finger at him in a threatening manner.

‘I said I had lost my keys, and thought I should have to go back home for them, especially as you have grown such a little tyrant. Why, what has come over you?’

‘I want to know about Peter,’ said the young girl, coaxingly.

‘Well, there was Peter Cooper,’ replied Snapper, reflectively, ‘shall I tell you all about him? And Peter Gœlett—plenty of Peters I have known, most of them thriving men enough and free with their money—remarkably free. I shouldn’t wish

to see anybody more free than Peter Rafferty was with mine.'

'I thought his name was Samuel?' said Edith, still keeping a sharp watch on every little slip of Snapper's.

'Peter or Samuel, what does it matter? See here,' said Snapper, rather gravely, 'don't you go getting into a snarl with Mrs. Clavering. Depend upon it, the game she is playing is not fit for you to take a hand in. I know what you are thinking about; you may be right or wrong, none of us can say. But do not cross that woman's path if you can help it. I think you would be better away from here altogether, but we cannot get you to see that.'

'Because I am afraid to leave my poor uncle. Think how kind he has been to us! And now he is in great danger of some sort—I told my father so, but I think he makes light of it. But you will all see

some day that what I tell you is true. Oh, Mr. Snapper,' she went on, earnestly, 'if I could only get you to believe me! You could do so much more than anyone else.'

'I don't see how. We could not shut up Mrs. Clavering in one of the Castle dungeons!'

'No, but you could keep a watch on her, and she is afraid of you. I have seen enough to tell me that. She does not care anything for the squire—I believe she wishes him dead. Then that wretched son of hers would be rich, though they cannot quite ruin Geoffrey, can they?'

'I suppose not; but why should you be so anxious about Geoffrey?'

Mr. Snapper looked searchingly at Edith as he put this question.

'Because he and I grew up together—we were in this house all through our childhood, did you not know that?' She

opened her eyes wide, and looked astonished at Snapper's obtuseness. 'Why, we were playfellows together!'

'And so were *we*, if it comes to that, before you ever heard the name of Claver-ing. And yet I don't find you taking all this wonderful interest in Rufus Snapper. How is that, young lady?'

'You ungrateful man! As if you did not know that I like you better than anyone in the world except papa.'

'Are you quite sure of that?' said Snapper, shaking his head rather doubtfully.

'Of course. Do you think I shall ever forget how good you were to me when I was a little girl?'

She came round to him, and sat upon a stool at his feet, and looked up into his face with the simplicity of a child. Snapper laid his hand upon her head, and his mouth twitched a little before he spoke.

‘I almost wish you were a little girl still, Edith; it is a great mistake to grow up, especially when you are a girl. Our best years are the first, I think; but here you are, a young woman. We must try to keep you to ourselves, the colonel and I, for we have a sort of partnership in you, you understand, and I guess it will not be quite convenient to let this young Clavering, or anybody else, into it. Do you understand that?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Edith, making him a curtsey.

‘No interlopers—that is quite settled?’

‘Oh, quite.’

Edith looked at him with laughter in the corners of her eyes.

‘And as for my old friend Polly—I mean Mrs. Clavering—suppose you leave her to me. I think I shall manage her as well as you could do, my dear.’

‘And a thousand times better, dear Mr. Snapper,’ cried Edith, feeling a great load taken from her mind, for her confidence in Snapper was unbounded. ‘I shall not be so much afraid now. Do you know that woman’s horrid son?’

‘Just a little,’ responded Snapper, preferring to keep his own counsel on that point. ‘Does he ever come here?’

‘I have seen a stranger lurking about the park sometimes, who is curiously like Mrs. Clavering, and yet unlike her, for he is vulgar-looking, and she is not *that*—so much even I will say for her. And once it seemed to me that I saw her speaking to him, but she was far from the house, near some rocks on the beach. There was a man with her—of that I am sure. It might have been some stranger, but I believe it was her son. Why should he come in this sly way to see his mother?’

And is it not a shame that she has driven Geoffrey out of the house, and set his father so terribly against him ?’

‘Geoffrey again ! Well, now, I think we have heard about enough of that young man for the present. Do you fancy that because I am getting old I cannot be jealous ?’

‘Jealous, are you ? And what about that mysterious lady in Paris ?’

‘You should never ask people about ladies in Paris,’ replied Snapper ; ‘it is a very good subject to leave alone. Now run away,’ he continued, ‘and have a talk with your father, while I will go and find those keys. You see I never give them up to the nobleman in plush, who demands them on one’s arrival in these big houses. No—I guess not. They open your traps and make free, and shake up your things all in a mess, and stuff them away under the

bed or up the chimney, and you can't find them again. I keep my own keys—ever since the days of Peter ;' and Snapper gave a mysterious look at Edith as he opened the door for her.

When he reached his own room, he sat down and fell into a brown study. It was quite as likely as not that the squire's wife meant mischief—that was clear to start with. When she wanted money, there was nothing she would not do to get it. To have as much money as she required at any particular moment was her due in this world ; if it could not be got in one way, it must be had in another. She saw no harm in getting it in any way ; the harm was to be obliged to go without it.

All this Snapper knew, and indirectly the lady had made him conform to the law which she had devised, namely, that her

interests must be studied first, and other things afterwards, if at all.

Snapper understood her tolerably well, but one thing somewhat bewildered him, and that was her devotion to her son. The Philadelphian knew a great deal more about that young man than he had chosen to reveal to Edith, and he had long felt convinced that as the woman had treated her husband, so her son would treat her; and thus, in a rough fashion, Peter Rafferty would be avenged.

‘She will have to face the music some day,’ said Snapper, at the end of his reverie, ‘and I should not like to be around at the time, for she will make things hum.’ And with this homely way of putting the matter, he made ready for dinner.

But distrust of herself, or of her future, was not weighing heavily upon Mrs.

Clavering that evening, for no one at the table was so full of animation. She addressed much of her conversation to Snapper, and to all appearance she made her way rapidly into his favour, much to the alarm of the colonel's daughter, and the surprise of the colonel himself. The squire's wife had a beautiful form still, as it has been said; eyes of seductive charm; a manner which was irresistible when she chose to make it so. These things will produce their effect. Rufus Snapper ceased to wonder that Roland Clavering had married her; but whether he had himself fallen under the spell was a question on which he alone could have thrown any light.

After dinner, she drew him aside to her own corner, and continued the siege. Her eyes were sharpened by her knowledge of mankind, and she was aware that the Philadelphian had not come down to

Porthcawl to see the ghosts. Nor had he come to see Edith Pendleton, although it was quite probable that a message from her may have brought him. What was the message about? These were hard points to unravel, but Mrs. Clavering was a woman who never despaired.

‘And do you intend to remain long in England?’

This she said towards the close of the conversation, after a glance at the clock, which told her that the hour was growing late.

‘I really cannot say; I have many things to look after, and some business to attend to which I knew nothing about when I came over here. It has sprung up since. I cannot go away again until it is finally settled.’

‘Is it, then, so very important?’

‘Not to me—but to others, yes. It

vitality concerns friends who are in my hands to a great extent, some of them without knowing it.'

'Well, at least they are safe with you,' said the lady, with a gracious smile.

'I am not so sure of that, but I shall do the best I can for them.' Then there was a pause. 'By-the-bye,' resumed Snapper, with the frigid manner which Mrs. Clavering remembered having seen at the memorable interview with him in Philadelphia, 'I have met your son in Birmingham. In fact, I am on pretty good terms with him. Were you aware of that?'

'He has not mentioned it,' said the lady, starting a little in spite of herself. 'But why should he, after all? He does not know from me that I was ever acquainted with you. And no one else knows it. I have not even mentioned it to my husband. Do you blame me for that?'

‘It is not for me to praise or blame you, madam; but your son will learn some day that I knew his father, and still know his mother. How can that be helped? I see him very frequently; he and his associates interest me. They are something peculiar to this country. There is one of them, however, who comes from mine—his name is Daly; an Irishman by birth. Have you ever heard of him?’

‘A dreadful man—a Fenian?’

‘No doubt it is the same. He and your son are inseparable. Sam is clever, in our American sense, you know; free and generous. He spends his money as if it did not cost him much trouble to come by it. And he must get through a good deal, I should imagine, for his friends are expensive—and they are not all in Birmingham.’

Mrs. Clavering’s face was now rather

pale. She could no longer conceal her uneasiness, for she saw that the Philadelphian knew more of the secrets of her son's life than she did—and how much there might be to know she partly conjectured and partly feared.

‘I am afraid,’ she said, with a sigh, ‘his associates are not all that I could desire; but is there anything worse than I have heard of? I appeal to you, Mr. Snapper, to tell me the truth. *You* recollect his father's fate—should my son fall under evil influences, I would tremble for him, for I know his nature. It is weak; you must have seen that.’ (Snapper made a sign of assent.) ‘Has he, then, fallen a victim to any designing woman?’

‘Not that he has told me,’ said Snapper, cautiously; ‘men generally keep such secrets to themselves as long as they can.’

But he should be on his guard. He is indiscreet, as some young men will be—he talks too freely.'

'In what way? Pray, explain.'

She spoke almost breathlessly, for not only was her curiosity aroused, but she detected something dangerous in Snapper's manner, and yet the nature of the danger she could not guess.

'Well, madam,' replied Snapper, after slowly deliberating with himself, 'he has got into a habit of living too much on the property he is to come into when——'

'When what? Pray, do not hesitate to tell me.'

'When the squire here is dead. He believes that you will be rich, and that his fortune will be made. If he merely *thought* that, there might not be so much harm done; but he talks of it, and loudly too, at all times and in all places—to this Daly

and others. And he goes on as if he expected the fortune pretty soon. The truth is,' added Snapper, drily, 'I was rather surprised to find Mr. Clavering looking so well as he does, although he does not appear to be strong.'

'And my son talks as if he expected his death?'

'Just so, madam. Any of his friends could tell you that. "The old squire can't last long"—such are his words pretty constantly. I hope he is mistaken; but although I expected to find Mr. Clavering a pretty sick man, and he is not that, yet he looks rather broken, like a man whose constitution is being undermined.'

'He does not complain,' said the squire's wife, now very grave and firm; 'he is not young, and sometimes suffers much. And bad reports of his son have distressed him. They come very often.'

‘From whom?’ cried Snapper, suddenly aroused in his turn.

‘That we do not know. They are generally anonymous.’

‘Then it is folly to pay attention to them.’

‘It may be so, but they tell upon Mr. Clavering’s spirits—that I can plainly see. But to count upon his death—that, indeed, is horrible!’

‘We will hope he will get better, madam—that is very desirable. I don’t mean for his own sake, for it is a matter of opinion whether it is better for a man to be here, or somewhere else. It all depends. But a few months ago they say he was so well and hearty! It may be that the air here does not suit him; or that the monotony preys upon his spirits. It must be very depressing to live in a place where the sea is always howling and

moaning in your ears, and where skeletons are all over the place like bugs—beetles, as they call them here. I should not like it—do you?’

‘Like it? I hate the place with all my heart,’ rejoined Mrs. Clavering, almost fiercely. ‘I wish I were a thousand miles away from it.’

‘Exactly — very natural. Life hereabouts cannot be very lively, and you want change. But it is always a great mistake to be impatient; I used to tell your first husband that.’ Mrs. Clavering looked round her when the allusion was made to Peter Rafferty. ‘Do not be afraid,’ said Snapper, ‘no one can hear what we are saying. Besides, your present husband knows you were married before?’

‘Quite so, but he does not know——’ she paused as if uncertain how to go on.

‘I understand,’ said Snapper, nodding

his head, 'he might not appreciate Peter Rafferty as you and I did. I shall say nothing to him on the subject. Not that it would matter much, I suppose, for Peter would not care, and you have nothing to fear.'

'There are sad passages in one's life, Mr. Snapper, which one cannot bear to have recalled.'

'That's so. Skeletons in the cupboard, as they say, only there appears to be nothing but skeletons in this cupboard, it is crammed full of them. I speak of the Castle,' said Snapper, observing that the lady looked up quickly at his words. 'No wonder you find it a little dull. I should say that a small churchyard would be preferable to having these ghosts perpetually poking their noses into your business. Have you seen any here?'

'Never,' said Mrs. Clavering, abstract-

edly. She was thinking of the dark allusions which had fallen from the Philadelphian.

‘Well, I should like to see one, if it could be managed. It would prove so much, and clear away so many doubts. But I would not have any *more* skeletons in the cupboard.’

‘I do not intend there shall be,’ said the lady with a look which was more directly responsive to Snapper than her words.

‘I believe I shall make a very pleasant visit here, after all,’ remarked Snapper, as they both rose.

‘I hope you will;’ and she offered him her hand. ‘I cannot pretend to understand all you have said, but at any rate we are friends?’

‘Oh, yes, by all means; you may remember I told you that long ago, when

you came to see me on the other troublesome business in Philadelphia.'

'I have so few friends,' she said, in a pathetic tone, 'that I cannot afford to lose one of them.'

'That is precisely what I have been trying to convey to you, madam,' said Snapper, with curious emphasis.

'Good-night, Mr. Snapper,' said she, with her sweetest smile. But Snapper did not smile; on the contrary, his gravity deepened as he followed her to the door.

Colonel Pendleton, who had noticed the protracted conference, approached Snapper when they were alone, and looked at him enquiringly.

'She has improved, if anything,' said the Philadelphian, as they moved off together; 'filled out in every way; more *to* her, as we say at home. Did you ever notice her eyes?'

‘Not particularly, but you gave yourself ample time to study them to-night, and we all thought you were making the best of your opportunities.’

‘Yes, they are very fine, those eyes of hers,’ said Snapper, musingly; ‘they almost bewitch you. They set Peter Rafferty crazy, and I don’t wonder, seeing that his head was as soft as mush. It is curious, though, when you come to think of it, that people should be willing to sacrifice so much for so little, even when their heads are not mushy.’

‘And is that all that has come of your long palaver?’ asked the colonel, with a smile, for he knew his friend’s ways, and saw that he was not in a communicative mood.

‘That is all, my dear colonel,’ said Snapper, lighting his candle. ‘Let us get to bed before the ghosts come out. It’s the

creepiest place I ever saw. As for the lady, colonel, if there is to be trouble she will prove a tough customer! Good-night;' and, with an affectation of great weariness, Mr. Snapper retreated to his own room.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER DARK.

THE next day there was no vestige of a cloud on Mrs. Clavering's brow. She came down to breakfast fresh and gay, and nothing could be more winning than her manner to her visitors, especially to Rufus Snapper. She had decided to secure his friendship if she could, and, if she could not, to establish a strict neutrality, and therefore the idea of taking umbrage at anything he had said never occurred to her. It is usually a very costly and dangerous thing to indulge in resentments,

and prudent men or women wisely deny themselves that luxury. Moreover, Mrs. Clavering, though by nature intrepid, had an instinctive dread of coming into conflict with the *Philadelphian*, if by any means it could be avoided. His knowledge of her past life, although she was not quite sure how far it actually extended, and the strange and disquieting fact of his acquaintance with her son—his allusions to Sam Rafferty's lavish expenditure, and to his mysterious friends in London—all this gave her great uneasiness. If her son had talked and boasted in the way Snapper had described, what fearful consequences might not his wild words bring upon her—perhaps upon himself, too—at some future time?

When she reflected upon the ominous allusions which had fallen from the *Philadelphian*, and considered that dark side of

her son's character which had been too clearly revealed to her of late years, she almost trembled at the thoughts which were suggested. Constantly resorting to desperate expedients to get money, in league with evil associates, and lured on by dreams of wealth, who could say into what dark abyss the unhappy young man might not be hurried? That he believed the squire's death would make him rich, and open for him a door of escape from all his difficulties—this she had long known. But to find that others knew it, and that her son made no secret of his plans for the future which lay beyond her husband's death—for all this she was not prepared. While she was smiling and chatting cheerfully at the breakfast-table, doubts and apprehensions were weighing heavily upon her, but the keenest of observers—and she had, as she well knew, one very keen ob-

server—would have failed to detect any sign of her anxieties.

‘She is one of the women,’ said Rufus Snapper to Colonel Pendleton, when they were out for a walk in the afternoon, ‘that you will never find at a loss, whatever may happen. Few women are, although we call them the weaker sex. Now, if you once let a man see that his game is seen through, he either gives it up or goes on playing it so badly that he is bound to lose. Women are different—especially this woman. Her head is level, but as for her principles they are just about as straight as one of your worm fences in Virginia. What do you think of her, my dear colonel?’

‘Well,’ said the colonel, artfully, ‘I think she is a very handsome woman, and you seemed to be very much of the same opinion last night. You sat a good while talking with her in a low tone; we do not

often catch you in that position, Rufus. You are not so much surprised as you were at my old friend, the squire, marrying again?’

‘I don’t know about that. The fact is, some of our talk last night concerned you. The lady has taken an immense interest in you--considers you are one of the greatest soldiers the war produced; knows all about your career. It is you who ought to have been sitting in the corner with her, not I.’

‘I see,’ replied the colonel, after a little deliberation. ‘There is something more serious in the wind than I imagined. She knows that we are great friends, and these compliments for me are intended to make a friend of you.’

‘You are on the right track,’ said Snapper, with a nod; ‘that part of the programme is all in big type, as one may say.’

‘But why is she so anxious to secure

you? The old affair in Philadelphia is forgotten now, and, if it were not, what of it?’

‘She is not afraid of that ; it would not be quite fair to rake up that business against her, and she knows I am not the man to do it. Her fears, I rather think, are for the future. She had no idea how well-acquainted I happen to be with her precious son in Birmingham, and she is afraid of all sorts of things about him. That he may bring himself into trouble, for instance, and *her* with him ; that he is married——’

‘And is he?’ interrupted the colonel.

‘To tell you the truth, I am not quite sure. There is something going on that I don’t yet quite see through. I mean to go and find out all about it as soon as you have done with me here. But before that,

I should very much like to know what you mean to do with Edith.'

'Leave her here for a little while longer—it is her own wish. I somehow feel that, if I prevailed upon her to go, I might regret it afterwards. All the same, the proper person to be near the squire is his son; but unluckily the breach between them seems to grow wider. Roland is obstinate; you might as well try to turn Niagara as move him when he is *set*. He is more bitter against Geoffrey than ever.'

'Just so—his wife has not been idle. Young Clavering will not come back while she lives.'

'Or while the squire lives,' said the colonel, in a low voice; 'is not that rather the way to put it?'

The two men looked at each other, and walked on for some time in silence.

‘And Edith is still intent upon bringing father and son together,’ said Snapper, presently. ‘Now, why is that, colonel? Why should she be so much interested in young Clavering? We talked that over once before, and I have been thinking a good deal about it since.’

Colonel Pendleton hesitated, and when he spoke it was with a somewhat uncertain manner. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘that the squire’s son is very much attached to Edith.’

‘Has he ever told her so?’

‘I think not—I am sure not. She would have told me. But I can see it, and I understand his silence. He thinks that, while this cloud is hanging over him, he has no right to say anything to Edith. That may be the reason, or there may be some other.’

‘Yes, there may be some other,’ repeated Snapper, very seriously.

‘Nothing dishonourable—I am certain of that. As for Edith, I scarcely know what to think about her. She will never allow a word to be said against the squire’s son; that may mean anything or nothing. You understand me, Rufus. I do not want to look forward to parting with her, but I suppose the day must come, and I am growing old. We cannot always keep her with us. Shall we turn back?’

They were now at some little distance from the house, and a chill wind blew from the sea.

‘I think I will go on a little further,’ said Snapper, who was in one of his brooding fits, ‘for I want to turn all this affair over in my mind, and I had better have it out with myself alone. So you go back to Edith, and say nothing to her about our talk. Mind how you go over these rocks—they’re plaguey slippery.’

He watched the colonel until he was nearly out of sight, and then kept on towards a high point of land which jutted far out into the sea at some distance from Porthcawl. He went very slowly, and sometimes came to a dead halt, evidently deep in thought. The days were short—shorter, as it soon appeared, than Snapper's walk, for when he turned back to retrace his steps the murk and gloom of evening were already upon the sea, and the tide was running in rapidly. But Snapper found his way to a path up the cliff, little wider than a sheep-track, and soon came in sight of a little house which had been built at the end of some garden walks about half-a-mile from the Castle. This was a sufficient landmark, for Snapper knew that he had to pass it on his way to the house. Therefore he plodded gently along, without bothering himself much about the time,

and presently, as he raised his head, after a long spell of study, he fancied he saw the figure of a man advancing rapidly towards the place he was making for. The light was uncertain, and he was not sure that his eyesight had not deceived him. He stood still and looked again. The man—if man there had been—had disappeared.

‘Great Scott,’ cried Snapper, in good American, ‘I could have sworn that I saw my dear friend Sam Rafferty go into that house on the cliff. It couldn’t have been his ghost, for a fellow like that would have no ghost; at any rate, not in so cool a place as Porthcawl beach.’

Once more he stood still, and looked hard in the direction of the lonely little house, near which he fancied he had seen the mysterious figure disappear. Then his wonder increased, for undoubtedly he saw another apparition, this time in female

form. He could make out that the figure was heavily draped, and that a shawl was wrapped around her head, as if she were cold, or had no wish to be recognised.

‘Bravo!’ said Snapper. ‘This is getting lively; every ghost in the Castle has come out for a walk. I’ve counted two—one very like my friend Sam Rafferty; the other might almost be his mother. She wouldn’t trust herself in a lonely place like this after dark with Sam Rafferty, if she knew as much about him as I do!’

But the fact is, that Mr. Snapper might often have seen the same persons going into the house on the cliff had he happened to have kept watch at about this same hour. He was quite right in his conjecture—one of the ghosts was Mrs. Clavering, and the other was her son. He had insisted upon seeing her, and anything was

better than running the risk of another meeting between Sam and the squire.

She entered the house, which consisted of a couple of large rooms, one above the other, with broad windows overlooking the sea; and there in the dim light she saw her son, reposing calmly in a rocking-chair, smoking a pipe.

‘I thought you were never coming,’ he growled, as his mother made her appearance. ‘It is getting dark ; this place gives one the shivers. It’s a long walk from that wretched village where I have to sleep to-night, and not a very pleasant one even in the daytime. It’s a deuced nasty thing for me to come here, let me tell you.’ And he knocked out the ashes of his pipe upon the table against which his mother was leaning.

‘Then why have you come? I need not ask,’ she added, bitterly. ‘It is the

old errand—you want money, the only motive which ever brings you to your mother. Will there never,' she said, more to herself than to him, 'come an end to this misery?'

'Well, there will be an end to it pretty soon, so far as I am concerned,' said Sam, coolly, 'unless you fork out a little more freely than usual. What is the use of five or ten pounds to me? How far do you think that goes? Something must be done. I have got myself into a mess that will rid you of me altogether if we don't take care. Listen! What was that?' Sam ran to the door, opened it, and looked out. There was nothing to be seen. 'I thought I heard a step outside on the gravel,' said he, moodily, as he went back to the rocking-chair.'

'What do you mean, Sam?' said the mother, in an anxious tone. 'What

dreadful thing have you been doing now?’

She went close to him, and looked at him keenly. It was not yet so dark but that they could see each other perfectly, and the mother detected at once that some greater trouble than usual impended over them both.

‘Dreadful thing!’ repeated Sam, with an attempted laugh which died in his throat. ‘That is the way you always go on—begin to make a fuss before you have any cause. If you want to know what is the matter, I can soon tell you. Through being kept so confoundedly short of money, I have had to get it where and how I could. I cannot live on air, I suppose?’

‘Have you forgotten how much I have given you during the last two or three years? It has been enough to support a family!’

‘Indeed! Well, then, it has not been

enough to support mine,' replied Sam, with a sneer.

In an instant the significant words which the Philadelphian had let drop darted through Mrs. Clavering's mind, and she stared at her son with something like dismay written in her face.

'Then it is true!' she said, in low, deep tones. 'This man knows more than he told me, as I suspected—and you are in his hands.'

'What man? What are you standing there mumbling about,' said Rafferty, roughly.

'Do you know a man named Rufus Snapper?' asked the mother.

'An American? Know him! Why, he is one of my most intimate friends. Often comes to Birmingham to see me. I rather think he means to put me into a good thing one of these days, if I will go with

him to Philadelphia. That is where you lived once, wasn't it ?'

'Never mind about that,' replied the mother, hurriedly ; 'tell me what you have disclosed to this man. You keep your secrets well enough from me—have you been equally careful with him ?'

'I don't know about that,' said Sam, uneasily ; 'he knows all my friends, you see, and——'

'What friends ? Those in London, for instance ?'

Sam started up from his chair in genuine alarm.

'Who has been talking to you about my London friends ? What do you know about them ?'

'I know this—that you are in some peril, and I tell you to beware of this man, Rufus Snapper, who has followed you for some purpose of his own, and is playing

with you like a child. You are no match for him.'

'You know him, then?'

'I have heard of him, and I tell you again to be on your guard. What unhappy fate is it,' she said, wringing her hands, 'that has brought you into contact with him! Heaven help me! If I have done wrong, it is likely to be visited heavily upon my head—and by you;' and she turned towards her son with tears in her eyes.

'Why, what ails you?' said Sam, with a hard laugh. 'You give one the jumps going on like this. Do you think I don't know how to take care of myself? As for this little scrape now, whose fault is it but yours? Why don't you shell out? Suppose you *have* given me a few pounds now and then, you could have had as much as you wanted from that old hunk'

in there. It was only to ask and to have with you. And now it comes to this—unless you help me to a hundred by this day week, I shall be done for. Tom Finch will raise a bigger storm over all our heads than you have heard even in this cursed place.'

'And, pray, who is Finch?'

'Who is he? Why, another first-rate friend of mine—at least, I always thought he was till lately,' added Sam, crestfallen. 'He *has* been putting the screw on me pretty hard, that's a fact. But it can't be helped now. I must not quarrel with him—he knows too much. Some time ago we both wanted money, and we helped each other to get it. Do you understand?'

'I understand nothing. How did you get this money?'

'You want to know how? Well, per-

haps you had better not ask. It was an accident, and it seems likely to be an unlucky one for all of us. One is tempted, you see, and then, when the mischief is done, it is too late to think of the consequences. That is how it was with me. I was led into this business by the man you just asked me about——'

'What—Mr. Snapper?' said the mother, in astonishment.

'Bah! No—Mr. Snapper is as rich as a Jew. The other man, I mean—Tom Finch. He led me into it, and now he's down upon me. That's the sort of thing they call fair play in this world.'

'But what *is* it that you were led into?' broke in Mrs. Clavering, impatiently. 'What have you done? Do you suppose you will ever get any more money from me now unless you tell me the truth?'

'I shouldn't get any if I did,' said Sam

to himself; but he made no reply to his mother.

‘Speak!’ she cried, sharply. ‘How has this man Finch gained a hold over you?’

‘We raised a little money together, if you must know,’ replied Sam, somewhat cowed by her resolute, almost fierce expression. ‘And it must be repaid. There is nothing very wonderful in that, is there?’

‘It was only a loan, then?’ said the mother, with an immense feeling of relief.

‘Only a loan? Well, isn’t that enough, if you haven’t got the money to pay it with? Call it what you like, the tin must be provided: a hundred pounds now, and more by-and-by. I am very sorry, mother,’ he continued, seeing that she had now covered her face with her hands, and was

sobbing bitterly, 'but it's the last time I will ever get into a scrape of this sort, I promise you. And I will keep my promise, never fear. It all came upon me unawares. When I first knew this man Finch, he was a college tutor, or something of that kind—no one could say a word against him. He lived with his daughter, but *she*'—Sam went on hurriedly—'had nothing to do with this muddle. We need not bring her into it. At present I cannot very well shake Finch off, but the first time I get a chance I will make the most of it. He has made me do anything he liked, and now he wants to leave me to bear the consequences. How could I help myself?' (Here he tried to take his mother's hand, but she shrank from him.) 'You would pay no attention to me when I asked you for help. A few pounds dribbled out now and then were only a drop in the bucket.

I have others to look to besides myself—what was I to do with them?’

‘What others can there be—unless you are married?’ said the mother, quickly, and recovering her composure. ‘Is this the wretched secret you have come to tell me?’

‘Married,’ said Sam, taken by surprise at his mother’s attack; ‘suppose I am? I might do worse. We all come to it some day or other.’

‘You said this man Finch has a daughter?’

‘Oh, yes, he has a daughter,’ replied Sam, gaily; for he seemed to be relieved to think that the worst was over. ‘I might have told you that long ago if I thought you took any interest in it. You would rather like her, I think, for she’s pretty—or at least she was—and quiet in style. She mightn’t suit down here, but

she does very well where she is. But why talk about her? It's getting late, and I ought to be getting on towards that dog-hole where I am to sleep. We had better cut it short. Can you let me have the money? That's the point.'

'I will see about it,' said Mrs. Clavering, drawing her shawl about her, and making a movement towards the door.

'But I must know,' continued Sam, a little confounded by his mother's altered manner. 'I tell you that, if I do not get it, I cannot say what may happen. It is more serious than you think. I am in a very tight place—you do not seem to understand the state of affairs at all. Surely you cannot have any difficulty in laying your hands upon this money, or as much more as you wanted? You are rich now, and will be ever so much richer when that old man dies. What a pity he

does not make up his mind to do that at once !’

‘ Why did you not represent that to him when you saw him ?’

Sam Rafferty started, for the recollection of his interview with the squire stung him even now.

‘ Confound him !’ said he, angrily. ‘ He had it all his own way that day, but my turn will come, and it’s partly your fault it hasn’t come before this. We might both have been comfortably off by this time if you had done the proper thing. When a man has lived as long as this old squire, he must have had about enough of it, and ought to make room for somebody else.’

‘ For his son, you mean ?’

‘ Oh, hang his son ! I know nothing about him. He cannot touch the money, I suppose, if you have played your cards well.’

‘Upon my word, you are not using many disguises this evening.’

‘No, why should I?’ exclaimed Sam, satisfied once more with the turn affairs had taken, and confident that his journey had been successful. ‘What is the use of nonsense between you and me? You married the man for his money, and now the sooner he lets go of it the better. That’s common-sense and business both combined.’

Mrs. Clavering looked at him with a feeling which she would have found it hard to describe. She had never seen quite so far or so truly into her son’s character before, and she was filled with a nameless dread.

‘Mark my words,’ continued Rafferty, now speaking in a loud and excited tone, ‘none of us can go on like this much longer. You must be tired of it, although

you are afraid to say so. So am I. The sooner this old man is out of the way the better—the better for everybody, and——’

Here he turned partly round towards his mother, in order to make sure that none of his words were lost, and to his astonishment she was gone. In the middle of his harangue, and just as he was getting well into his subject, she had opened the door quietly and disappeared. As she passed out, she saw—or was it a fancy?—the figure of Rufus Snapper near the window on the garden side; but she was too agitated to go near enough to resolve her doubts. These last words of her son had sufficiently alarmed her. What if anybody else had heard them? She hurried to the house with but one fixed resolve in her heart—to allow her son to come to Porthcawl no more.

While she was thus hastening from the

scene, Sam Rafferty stood looking at the door in blank consternation. It would now have been quite dark but for a faint glimmer of wintry moonlight which came reflected from the sea. For a few minutes Rafferty doubted the evidence of his eyes, then a bright thought struck him.

‘She has gone to get me the money,’ he said, slapping the crown of his hat; ‘what an ass I must have been not to have thought of that!’

With this consolatory belief, he decided to wait, and he did wait; first for half-an-hour, which seemed very long; then for another half-hour, which seemed four times as long. Sam Rafferty did not care a great deal for his own society at any time; he had found that it soon grew monotonous, and, after a time, oppressive. Again, he did not like being alone in the dark, and this place was getting very dark. There

was not a sound to be heard except the plashing of the sea on the rocks beneath, as it came gently in with the tide. At last he could hold out no longer. He opened the door and looked out towards the Castle, but the trees hid it from his sight and the path was as dark as a coal-mine.

At last the truth dawned upon him—he had been left to spend the night there, or to go back on his solitary way to the village inn. Money there was none to be had.

‘I see how it is,’ said he, ‘she is savage because she took it into her head that I am married, and, like a fool, I drove that idea in still further instead of trying to get it out. A pretty mess I’ve made of it—but, all the same, I am determined not to be the only one to suffer. I will settle it now in spite of her;’ and, with much ner-

vousness and reluctance, he turned into the black road.

His mother had, just at that moment, met Mr. Snapper on the staircase, and had asked him whether he had been for a long walk.

‘Not very far,’ was his answer; ‘but I am tired and cold. The air is raw, and I have been standing still—thinking, I suppose.’

‘On the sea beach?’

‘Close to it, madam. It has given me a chill.’

They looked hard at each other.

‘For a man of your experience, Mr. Snapper, you are singularly imprudent.’

There was a strange, hard glitter in Mrs. Clavering’s eye as she said this, such as Snapper had never noticed before, and there seemed an ominous ring in her words.

‘She will be dangerous,’ thought the Philadelphian, as he went on to his room, ‘but that I knew before. Did she see me, or does she only suspect? It matters little which! To-morrow I must get out of this and go and see how my friends are getting on in Birmingham. Perhaps Sam Rafferty may have something new to tell me.’

A queer smile appeared on his lips as he thought of Rafferty. And, for the rest of the evening, he carefully avoided the squire’s wife.

CHAPTER X.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

SAM RAFFERTY and Patrick Daly were seated together in a public-house in New Street, Birmingham, on the night of Rafferty's return from his unprofitable visit to his mother. They were not in a good humour with each other or with themselves, for money was scarce, and a scarcity of money will sour the sweetest temper in the world. No one knew exactly how either of these two friends and comrades lived—Rafferty was connected with some local political organisation, but only

in a subordinate capacity, and that was never likely to make his fortune. Daly, it was well known, was an active leader among the Fenians, and it was even thought that he was acquainted with all the secrets of the 'dynamite section,' but thus far he had shown considerable prudence, and contrived to keep himself clear of all serious scrapes. He had known Sam Rafferty for several years, and had looked upon him as a man of solid 'expectations,' and therefore worth cultivating. Moreover, he had from time to time advanced him certain sums of money, for Sam had great skill as a borrower—almost a genius for it, or he would never have beguiled money from the pockets of an Irish American. But he was now nearly at the end of his tether, for his mother had left him in the lurch, and Daly began to see that he had been duped.

This evening Rafferty was endeavouring to revive his flagging spirits with brandy-and-water, and Daly was watching him with keen, but half-contemptuous attention.

‘ And you mean to say you went all that way, and came back without what you went for, and paid your own expenses? I don’t call that a profitable business.’

‘ Well, who could help it?’ replied Sam, sulkily. ‘ If you think you can manage my affairs so much better than I can, do it; I’ll pay you a good commission.’

‘ What was the name of the Castle,’ said Daly, in a scoffing tone which Rafferty could not very well mistake, for the Irishman had now become sceptical of the very existence of Porthcawl.

‘ You mean to say that you don’t believe what I have told you? Why, everybody knows it to be true, and you can prove it

for yourself if you like. I'll take you down and show you the Castle whenever you like—it's big enough to be seen.'

'When shall we start?' inquired Daly, pretty well satisfied that Sam was drawing entirely upon his imagination.

'Start? To-morrow, if you like—no, I can't go to-morrow, for I expect a friend of mine here. You've seen him; Mr. Snapper, the American. He has written to say he means to pay me a visit. I wish he would ask you to dinner, for he knows how to order one.'

'Thank you, I can do without his dinner. Tell me some more about that castle. Your mother lives there, didn't you say?'

'Certainly,' said Sam, impatiently, draining his glass at a gulp. 'Isn't she the squire's wife? Where else should she live?'

'Oh, if she's his wife, all right. That

alters the matter. Naturally she lives there, and why don't you ?'

'And so I might, if I liked,' replied Sam, calling for a fresh tumbler, and talking rapidly as the brandy began to work. 'I've been invited to stay there often. My mother has asked me, and so has the squire. *He* is a most particular friend of mine,' continued Sam, with a wry face, as once more a vision of Roland Clavering's cold, stern look came back to his mind. He drowned the recollection in another potent draught. 'You would like him, Daly,' said he, beginning to get his story mixed up. 'He is one of the old school, you know, stiff and formal, but very hospitable. He was mighty so to me ;' and Sam stooped down to the fire to get a light.

'Then you *have* seen him ?'

'Seen him ? Why, didn't he marry my mother ? I've told you so a score of times,

but you seem to forget everything. There's another good point about him,'—Sam here dropped his voice a little—'he's as rich as a Jew, and keeps a lot of money in the Castle. A bank in which he once had money failed, and since then he keeps all his cash in his own house. Queer start, rather, isn't it?'

'Oh, very,' replied Daly, whose disbelief again wavered. After all, there might be some foundation of truth in his friend's story. He made up his mind to sift it thoroughly, and therefore he took a good deal of pains to keep Rafferty's tongue well oiled with the oil which set it moving most easily. 'And so this old gentleman is rich, and you will come in for a good pile when he dies. Well, if he lived in some places where I have been, he would not stand in your way long. If it was *my* case now, I should——'

‘Well, what would you do?’ said Sam, looking eagerly at Daly.

‘What does it matter? If I told you, it wouldn’t make any difference. You fellows over here have no go in you. I suppose, now, you would wait ten years more for this money without doing anything to get it?’

‘I’ll be hanged if I would. You don’t quite understand me yet. I want you to know one thing—I’m not afraid of anybody or anything;’ and Sam banged the table in a most courageous manner.

‘I daresay not,’ sneered Daly, with a laugh which might have offended Sam, if his sensibilities had been a little sharper. ‘But don’t storm at me, my rooster. When I’m shouted at, I’m apt to turn ugly. Better keep big words for your Fee-fo-fum Castle; it’s dangerous to try them on me.’

‘You’re a good fellow, Daly,’ said Sam, beginning to feel a little giddy, ‘and I’ll put you all right with the squire. I think he would take to you first off, and, if you were to work *him* properly, you’d find it pay better than grizzling yourself to fiddle-strings over the wrongs of Ireland. Who cares about Ireland, except at election times? *That* for Ireland!’ (with a snap of the fingers). ‘Let it all go, and come with me to Porthcawl. You’ll be sure of a hearty welcome. The old man is very fond of me. I told you how kind he was?—too kind a blessed deal!’ added Sam to himself.

‘I know it by heart,’ said Daly, and in truth Sam had often told the story before—a highly imaginative one—of the grand reception accorded to him by the squire.

‘Of course, I understand ; don’t want to hear it again. But suppose you saw your

way clear to getting some of the old nob's money—would that make a difference? How would that suit your complaint? Only mind you—the squire is one of the stuck-up sort, with a freezing kind of look ;' and Sam actually felt something like a shiver run through him at the moment, for he could not forget, try as hard as he would, the sardonic gaze of the squire. That and his brandy-and-water completed the muddledom which had been coming over him, and for the first time he began to describe the scene as it really occurred. 'Looked me through and through,' said he, gloomily. 'That's the way with these swells; they think you are dirt. There, here he stood——' here Sam stood up with his back to the fire, and made a ludicrous attempt to imitate the manner of the squire—'looking at me as if I were a carrion crow! If I had him here

now, I would wring his neck for him !'

'No doubt,' remarked Daly, cool and observant. 'But what did he say?'

'Say? Oh, he didn't *say* much, that was the worst of it. Confound him, he made me feel so cussed mean. All he did was to ask me questions, and sneer—as polite as Lord Chesterfield all the time. My mother wasn't there; if she had been, she would very soon have made it all right for me.'

'The same as she did this last time?'

'What do you mean?' said Sam, almost forgetting his late journey in the excitement of the recollection of his first visit to Porthcawl. 'I was talking of the time when I expected the squire to put me up at the Castle, in the old English style—baronial halls, roast ox, and that sort of thing. If *his* is the old English style, I don't like it so much as I thought I should.'

He stood up as if he were a king, and looked down at me as if I were a stuffed monkey. It was his darned politeness that bothered me—I couldn't get hold of him anywhere.'

'And so you came away?' said Daly, perceiving that at last he had got hold of the right end of the story.

'Why, what else could I do? Old razor-bill wouldn't let me stay there.'

'I thought you said the last time you told me this tale that he asked you to dinner?'

'Who asked me?' replied Sam, now in a thick haze.

'Why, the nice old gentleman at the Castle.'

'What nice old gentleman?'

'Your step-father, who took such a fancy to you. Have you got two step-fathers?'

‘Two!’ muttered Sam, passing his hand across his forehead, ‘I feel just now as if I had half-a-dozen. But, mind you, if ever I go into that house again, I’ll make that big footman at the door wonder what’s the matter with *him*. I can’t *swear* to it, you understand, because I felt so bothered, but I rather think he kicked me out. I tell you in confidence between gentlemen; sort of thing I shouldn’t like to have known! While I was standing at the door, I felt something very queer and sudden like, just *here*, and then I shot forward, and fell down the last two steps. What should you say that was?’

‘I can’t say,’ replied Daly, coldly; ‘I never had those symptoms. And was that all?’

‘All? Well, wasn’t it enough? I thought it was at the time. Somebody shall pay for it, never fear. You and I,

if we keep our eyes open, can make a snug thing out of this. You can go back to America, and I shall have plenty of money for my wife—I mean for my mother.'

'Your wife?' repeated Daly, still watching his victim like a hawk. 'So there is a wife in the background? That is rather worse than a step-father. You're a nice man to borrow money on the strength of your wonderful fortune. It strikes me that I'm only just beginning to know you, Mr. Rafferty. Take care what you're about—not many men could pull the wool over my eyes, and you don't look as if you might be one of them. When am I to have that money?'

'How can I pay it till I get it myself?' remonstrated Sam, half-scared at Daly's mien. 'What a rum fellow you are! You look as if you could murder a man. Do it, if you like, only don't let it be *me*. I

mean what I say—if you like to go down to Porthcawl Castle, I will see you through all the expenses, and put you up to a good thing. You're just the sort of man for it—not afraid of anybody. I will pay every shilling I owe you, and add something handsome to it as soon as this old man is out of the way. First of all, come and look at the place, then you'll be satisfied that it's really *there*. Is that fair?'

'That seems fair enough,' admitted Daly. 'Now one word of caution—the less you say of all this to Finch the better, and be very careful how you knock my name about when you're talking to him.'

'What Finch?' said Rafferty; for, having suddenly forgotten that in one of his convivial moments he had breathed that name before, he was now prepared to deny all knowledge of it. But a gesture of

Daly's again restrained him. 'To be sure,' he stammered, 'now I know the man you mean. I *have* mentioned my mother to him, and talked about the Castle a little—especially to his daughter. You know her, of course? Mrs. Martin, as they call her, though who Mr. Martin is I never could make out.'

'That is one of the mysteries,' replied Daly, still observing Rafferty closely, and noticing that he seemed somewhat confused. 'A wife without a husband; one has heard of such things before.'

'Oh, yes—and seen 'em, and very well they are in their way. But this Mrs. Martin is a scorcher—no one could get on with her very long. She has a deuce of a temper—a regular spitfire—and she drinks. Her father taught her that, and it's about the only thing he ever did teach her.'

'You often go to see them?'

‘Yes, I do, because Finch and I are—well, we are in a little business together. Strictly private! We have been in it ever so long.’

‘Take another drink—it will do you good.’

Sam readily assented, and Daly talked about indifferent affairs till the new dose was half gone. Then he returned to the charge.

‘And does this business of yours with Finch *pay*?’ he asked.

‘It did at first,’ replied Sam, with a grin. ‘But after a time it fell off; Finch couldn’t get hold of the *stuff* fast enough.’

‘What stuff?’

‘Why, the raw material, to be sure,’ said Sam, laughing at his friend’s evident bewilderment. ‘Oh, you’d never guess what it is! It was about the softest thing you ever heard of while it lasted.’

‘And so it broke up?’

‘Not quite; we keep it going now and then. But don’t you say anything about it, for Finch is a spitfire, too, like his daughter. You must go and see her—tell her you’re a friend of mine.’

‘I will,’ said Daly, emphatically. ‘Where do they live?’

Sam gave the address; he would have thought twice before doing so if he had been sober.

‘Good,’ continued Daly, making a note in a little book. ‘I will go one evening and ask for you. Finch I know already.’

‘Oh! you do,’ exclaimed Sam, in a sleepy way. ‘Well, then, you know an awful villain—I mean a regular trump. Did you ever see him write names?’

‘What names?’

‘Any name—yours, if you like. Just write your name down once and give it to

him, and he'll imitate it so as you wouldn't know it from your own. Cleverest fellow going is Tom Finch.'

'Is that the line of business you spoke of just now?'

This question seemed to sober Rafferty in an instant. He looked at Daly sharply, and the thought forced itself upon him that he had suffered himself to be drawn out in a very rash manner. He made straight for the door.

'Good-night,' he said, in a knowing tone; 'we shall meet to-morrow. Then I will introduce you to Mr. Rufus Snapper—he is far better worth your knowing than Tom Finch.'

'Confound him!' thought Daly, as the door closed. 'I put just one question too many, and scared my man away. But I shall get him yet; plenty of time! You've taken a big contract in hand,

Master Sam, when you go in for swindling me. Let us see how you come out of it !' And, with these reflections, the Irishman also took his departure.

CHAPTER XI.

A RECONNAISSANCE.

WHENEVER Mr. Rufus Snapper went to Birmingham, he made a point of inviting Sam Rafferty to dinner at the Queen's Hotel, giving him as much as he could desire to eat and drink—and that was not a little. It was this course of treatment which had led Sam to speak to his mother of Mr. Snapper as about the best friend he had in the world.

He was seated, then, with his best friend, on the day following the scene with Daly, at one of the round tables in the

dining-room of the hotel, contemplating with joy a fine roast pheasant which had just been set before them, accompanied with a bottle of champagne. Nothing could have been more to Sam's taste ; and yet, so chequered is this life, and so uncertain are its pleasures, that even in the height of his enjoyment a cloud passed over his spirit, and he put down his knife and fork, and sighed.

‘What is the matter now?’ asked his host, who had been keeping one eye on all his movements.

In reply to this question, Sam Rafferty looked up a little disconcerted.

‘I am afraid,’ said he, ‘that I must go in half-an-hour or so ; there is a meeting of the club you have heard me speak about, and I must be there. I am the secretary, and they cannot get on without me.’

‘Well, go by all means; but there is time enough to eat your dinner. Then we will adjourn to the club together.’

‘You will go too?’

‘Undoubtedly,’ replied Mr. Snapper, treating the thing as a matter-of-course. ‘I don’t want to spend the evening alone. Why should I not accompany you?’

‘Well,’ said Sam, hesitating, ‘the fact is we do not usually admit strangers. But you are an American, that makes a difference. Perhaps there will be no objection made; at any rate, we can try it if you say so. If you go in, I can introduce you to my other great friend, Pat Daly.’

Mr. Snapper refrained from saying that this had been an essential part of his present scheme in visiting Birmingham. There was no chance of getting at Daly, he was aware, except through this first accidental meeting at the famous club.

After that, he hoped to improve his acquaintance.

‘No one will object to me,’ said Snapper, in a confident tone. ‘Your people borrowed their political machine from us, and cannot grumble at an American stepping in occasionally to see how it works. You have some long-headed people here, but they don’t know all the twistings and windings of the political ropes, although they think they do. If the other side in politics had any sense, they would wake you up considerably—only they are half asleep. As for Daly, I should like to see him. Of course, I’ve heard all about him.’

‘He’s worth knowing,’ remarked Sam, ‘but at times he’s a little cranky. He doesn’t like strangers, for he is aware that the police follow him up pretty sharply. Never mind; he won’t be afraid of *you*. I

have talked of you to him many times ; you'll be like old friends.'

'Then that's settled—now you have just ten minutes more, so don't talk.'

Sam was only too glad to be left at liberty to ply his knife and fork, but the ten minutes were soon over, and the Philadelphian rose punctually from the table.

'Put some cigars in your pocket,' said Snapper, by way of consoling the melancholy secretary ; 'we will have this dinner over again another night.'

They went along chatting gaily until they reached the meeting-place, where most of the delegates were already assembled. No one made any difficulty about the admission of Mr. Snapper. In fact, when it was announced to the assembly that an American was present,

there was a round of cheers, for which Snapper did not much care, but he was secretly pleased when Daly came up to him, and voluntarily introduced himself. They sat down side-by-side, and before half-an-hour had passed they were on excellent terms. Daly made no secret of his contempt for the 'concern' in which he was now taking a part.

But some good rousing speeches were delivered, and Snapper was especially struck with the remarks of the chairman, a thin, shrewd-looking man, who spoke without violence, and who evidently commanded the sympathies of the meeting.

'We are winning fast,' said this man, 'and it rests with us to decide when the whole fabric which has been raised on superstition and selfishness shall come to the ground. The next time we are out of power, it will be done. Office has silenced

or paralysed some of our best leaders ; set them free, and they will soon put you on the right road again. These politicians always keep an arrow or two in reserve. Wait till the Tories come in again ! Then will be signed the death-warrant of privilege, wherever it may exist, for there is nothing to save it. The *resisting* power is gone.'

'Of course all these men have axes of their own to grind,' said Daly, when the speaker sat down, 'but that fellow is right. Look round the room ; everybody you see is a power in his own neighbourhood. These Radicals know what they want, and mean to get it, if they can.'

'It was a pretty good government, too, at one time,' said Snapper, who, like most Americans, was conservative in his principles. 'It seems a pity they did not know how to take care of it.'

‘Oh, well, it had lasted about long enough, and a nation which has taken to worshipping jaw is bound to come to grief. Here the greatest man is the fellow who can make the longest speeches. By-the-by, didn’t I see you come in with Sam Rafferty?’

‘You did,’ said Snapper, putting himself on guard in an instant.

‘He’s rather a queer customer. I need not tell you that he has gone into this thing because it *pays*. At present he’s rather hard up, and politics come in handy.’

‘Don’t they say he is likely to be rich one of these days?’ asked Snapper, artfully.

‘He has told you that, has he! Or somebody else has for him. Between ourselves, I hope it’s true, but I never knew what to believe. His mother will be very

rich when her husband dies—*that's* true, I fancy; and the husband is old—that's a comfort.'

'You seem interested in it?'

'Well, Sam owes me a good deal of money; he's been getting in my debt one way or another for several years past. I want the money pretty badly now, and all I can get out of him is a promise to pay it back as soon as this Welsh squire—whatever his name is—clears out. I hope that will be soon, but, if it is not, I have a plan of my own for hurrying things up a little.'

'What is it? Perhaps I could help you?'

Daly was about to whisper something to Snapper when a murmur ran round the room, and another round of cheering broke out.

'Listen!' said Daly, diverted from his

purpose, greatly to Snapper's chagrin. 'They are calling for you—I thought they would insist on your making a speech. All Englishmen are crazy to hear a speech.'

The cry for the American had, indeed, become pretty general, and, although Snapper tried at first to ignore it, he soon found that the meeting was not to be balked. He rose to his feet and leaning slightly forward, with one hand resting upon the table, he began to speak in a half conversational sort of way, though very distinctly.

'My friends,' said he, 'I have been paying a good deal of attention to all that has gone on to-night. It appears to me that you are on the right track. You will soon succeed in "elevating politics," as your chairman says, so that what they call the upper classes will be driven out of them

altogether. Well, they have had a pretty good innings, and, if they have not been able to take care of themselves, it's their own fault. They will find it a little too late to begin now. What you have to do is to go on imitating us. Between lobbyists, "bosses," and "favourite sons," we have done away with gentlemen, or pretty nearly so. See the results. Our politics are elevated enough, I believe; so are our leaders. Look at our House of Representatives and our State Legislatures. Where else will you find so much purity and patriotism, or so many high-toned statesmen? All creation can't show their equal, I guess—no, and you may throw this little country of yours into the bargain, and I'll still say the same.'

Here there was some applause, but Daly looked hard at Snapper, for he detected a spice of raillery in his remarks. The

Philadelphian seemed to be thoroughly in earnest, and he went on without much regard to the effect he was producing.

‘ Now, my friends, you are all agog to “ Americanise ” your institutions, and you are going so fast that I really believe you’ll manage to get ahead of us before long. It would be rather odd if it turned out that what we are determined to throw away you are eager to pick up, and *vice versa*. More unlikely things have happened. We are getting sober and steady as we grow older, while you are lashing out with all the friskiness of youth. Some people will tell you that these experiments are dangerous, and that you will rue them bitterly, or give your children good cause for doing so. Never mind these croakers ! Go on just as you are doing, and you will lead yourselves somewhere about where we found ourselves in 1861, if you know

where that was.' (Cheers ; no one understanding the speaker's allusion.)

' They say you want to get hold of property. Well, so does everybody. You are not the first land-grabbers this country has ever seen, are you? The rich have had a good time, and now if *you* were made rich, you could grin and bear it!' (Hear, hear.) ' It would do the rich a great deal of good to take your places for a time ; depend upon it, their eyes would be opened to a good many things they don't see now. They say that the upper classes helped to make this a great country, but if they did, they took all the profit while you got all the hard knocks. Now it is your turn. You want to get rid of the aristocracy and other lumber, and after that to have a republic.' (Cheers.) ' Then everybody will have a fair chance and be happy. (' You've hit it.') ' Yes, I know I have.

Forms of government alone make men prosperous; that is the teaching of history, I believe. We have got a republic, and a good many things besides: such as naval rings, and Indian rings, and land rings, and whisky rings—rings all over us, and bells on our toes. Likewise we have had one of the biggest wars ever seen, and if you think no jobbery went on then, or afterwards, go on thinking so, my friends; and may the thought cheer you in your lonely moments!

‘I heard your chairman say that when England is in your hands she will be a totally different country. That’s so; all her old faults will be purged away, and there can’t very well be a crop of new ones, with such men as you to take charge of her. You will not have dukes and lords and millionaires swinging around all over the place then, like a bull’s tail at

fly-time. Down with all your institutions, relics of barbarism and the middle ages.' (Loud cheers.) 'That is the cry, is it not?' ('Yes, yes.') 'So I thought. Well, down with them; there's nobody to stop you now, in my opinion. But, when you have got England into your hands, let me tell you, my enlightened friends, what you had better do with it. Hand it over to the United States. We shall know how to take care of the poor old land, the mother of freedom, the parent of the stock from which we Americans spring. She need fear no new insults from us in her sorrows and her old age. The little island, renowned for so many ages, which kept the sacred fire of liberty alight when it was extinguished everywhere else, and which made itself an immortal name by the gallant deeds of its sons—depend upon it we shall know how to take care of it, ay,

and what is more, we shall not fear to give a good account of its enemies, at home and abroad, who are hungering and thirsting to trample it into the dirt and dishonour it.'

There was some applause when Mr. Snapper sat down, but it died out quickly, for evidently there were many in the room who did not know what to make of the speech. Presently the delegates began to whisper among themselves, and a little knot gathered round the chairman. While this was going on, the Philadelphian coolly put on his hat, and walked out, and Daly followed him. In a few minutes they were seated together in Snapper's room; and it was rather odd that neither of them said a word about the meeting.

'Now let us have a quiet talk,' said Snapper, when he had provided his new friend with one of his incomparable 'Henry

Clay's.' 'Of course I have been hearing of you for a long time, and have listened to your praise from Sam Rafferty. I never had a doubt that he was right about *you*, although I generally allow fifty per cent. for an active imagination when he is talking, especially when he goes off half-cock about that Welsh castle. A good deal of what he says then is mere moonshine.'

'So I thought,' said Daly, moodily. 'I suppose there's no such place?'

'Yes, there is, but the squire has a son to inherit it, and I don't see how Sam is ever to grow fat on the estate.'

'He says his mother will come in for a lot of money when the squire dies.'

'I cannot say,' remarked Snapper, with a shrug. 'Such expectations sometimes turn out to be a pretty poor dependence. Rafferty ought to have money enough now—what does he do with it?'

‘That I can’t tell you,’ said Daly, but with a look of much secret merriment. ‘I suppose there must be the usual explanation. I cannot think of any other.’

‘Just so—who is she? as that old Sultan was always asking. Married or otherwise? That is the point.’

‘I have never been able to make out. In fact, I do not even know who the woman is, although I have my suspicions. Did you ever hear him speak of a man named Finch?’

‘Well, yes,’ said Snapper, as if trying to recall the name—familiar enough, in reality, to him. ‘I rather think I have.’

‘I believe Finch could tell you the ins and outs of all this better than anybody, except Sam himself. Be careful in your dealings with Finch if you ever come across him—he’d cheat his own mother if he had one.’

‘One of that sort, eh?’ remarked Snapper, not betraying by his manner his great anxiety to find out all he could about Thomas Finch.

‘A thorough scoundrel! He and his daughter lodge in the same house, down in the city; a queer place. *Her* name is Mrs. Martin—a married woman. Sam Rafferty has business with Finch sometimes; so have I, though not exactly of the same kind. As for Mrs. Martin, she is never to be seen when I go, and I never saw her husband—not at her house, or with her, any way,’ added Daly, significantly.

‘Perhaps she is a widow,’ suggested Snapper.

‘I think not; I rather suspect I could name the happy man. Now just suppose,’ continued Daly, leaning over towards Snapper, ‘that it should prove to be

Rafferty? I have heard allusions pass between Finch and Sam that nothing else seems to explain. Wouldn't that be a pretty mess? No more money from his mother then! She thinks he is good enough for a duchess—it's a wise mother that knows her own son! She has forgiven him a good deal, but I don't think she would ever forgive his marrying Tom Finch's daughter. He very seldom talks to me about either Finch or Mrs. Martin, except when he is drunk. He nearly let the cat out of the bag once or twice—that is, if she is *in* the bag, for of course I cannot be sure. What seems strange is, that Mrs. Martin is never seen with him, and when I go to Finch's and ask for him, they both pretend to be surprised. They over-act their parts all round.'

‘Then Sam may not be her husband, after all?’

‘That’s just it. He’s mixed up in some mess of the kind, I’ll swear, and that’s where his money goes. As for Finch, you would take him for a gentleman, when his decent suit is out of pawn, and he happens to be sober. Once he was what they call a “coach” to fellows at the university; but he must always have been a bad lot. He tumbled down fast enough to what he is now—loafer, begging-letter writer, sharper, anything that comes first. His daughter is not so bad; but I *have* heard strange stories about her.’

‘Nothing to her discredit, I hope,’ said Snapper, quickly, and in such a way as to excite Daly’s surprise.

‘You know her?’ exclaimed the Irishman, some vague suspicion suddenly aroused.

‘How should I? But your story is so curious that I feel interested in the parties.

You were saying that Mrs. Martin——’

But this attempt to lead Daly back to the point where he had broken off did not succeed. He seemed disinclined to say anything more about Mrs. Martin, whereas concerning Finch he was still willing to talk.

‘When he is hard up,’ said the Irishman, ‘he comes prowling round after Rafferty, and he does not go back empty-handed. He must have some sort of hold over Sam, or he would get no money from *him*. If Finch has got him into his power, he will squeeze him pretty dry.’

‘He is a determined man, then?’

‘A good deal more so than Rafferty. Meanwhile, I am kept out of my money. I must wait, it seems, till that infernal old Welsh squire is dead!’

‘And then you may never get it,’ suggested Snapper, quietly.

‘Will I not? We shall see! As I told you before, I have a plan of my own if everything else fails. One of these days I am going down with Rafferty to have a look at that wonderful castle he is always bragging about. Perhaps I may call upon his mother, while I am about it.’

‘Is that your plan?’ asked the vigilant Snapper.

‘No—my trump card is better than that, I hope. Now I must be going, and I am very glad we know each other. One word more—if you are at all curious about Mrs. Martin, why don’t you go and see her? Easily ask for Tom Finch, you know—his daughter may be in, although I never happened to catch her.’

‘If I am curious!’ repeated Snapper to himself, when the door closed behind his visitor. ‘Well, a woman who has led the life she must have lived is worth knowing.’

And her father—but he and I are not exactly strangers. His daughter he keeps out of sight, it seems, as much as possible, or at least he keeps her out of *mine*—and of that Irishman's. What is the clue to the mystery? Some of us would sleep better to-night if I could find it out.'

Snapper lit another cigar, and sat down, and turned many busy thoughts over and over in his mind for hours together until every sound in the hotel was hushed. And even then he had come to no conclusions. A few broken words fell from his lips, and he seemed restless and irritable. At last he lit a candle and went to his bed-room.

'Mrs. Martin and Rufus Snapper are bound to become better acquainted,' he murmured, just before sinking off to sleep. 'If she is Sam's wife, I am sure my old friend Polly Rafferty would like to know

it. As for Finch——' but Snapper was one of those fortunate individuals who have only to lay their heads upon their pillows to fall asleep, and before he had even time to finish his sentence he was far away in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. MARTIN.

ALMOST under the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral there is a cheerless labyrinth of narrow streets, not yet entirely submerged by the rapidly rising tide of modern improvement, but left stranded upon the shore, like the wrecks of a bygone generation. Wretched as these tenements are, they are all occupied, but, except to the inhabitants, their very existence is almost unknown. They are so hemmed in and hidden away that, for all practical purposes, they have disappeared from the view

of the outer world. Huge warehouses overshadow them; magnificent avenues, which would have astonished and delighted the old Roman denizens of London, have gone within a hair's-breadth of cutting them off from the face of the earth altogether, and, as it is, have shorn them of their former glories, taking in a corner here, and another there, or enclosing them in a *cul-de-sac*.

There is Addle Hill, a little street of grimy houses, with a bootmaker's and a newsvendor's shop to remind the passer-by that the neighbourhood really has a resident population. Then there is Knight Rider Street, along which the knights of old are said to have ridden to the tournaments in Smithfield, but now a confused heap of lawyers' offices and warehouses, with a public-house wedged in between them here and there. The tavern window

contains a placard announcing that billiards may be played within, and therefore it is possible that at night, when almost all the rest of the great city is a desert, sounds of revelry still ascend towards the black dome of St. Paul's from these melancholy precincts. But who the revellers are must ever be a mystery; perhaps the decayed old men who used to dart out upon strangers in Doctors Commons, like ancient spiders upon flies, threw off their white aprons after dark, and played wildly for beer and 'penny screws' with belated lawyers' clerks.

But in the daytime the whole locality has a dreary aspect, for there are few scenes which have a more dispiriting effect upon men who are not lawyers than a row of lawyers' offices. Depressed by these surroundings, and by occasional glimpses of black and sordid alleys, the explorer

will presently find that he has strayed into Little Trinity Lane, where he will see inscribed over a narrow archway the words, 'Sharp's Court.' Close by is a general dealer's, or 'chandler's shop,' filled with such goods as the poor are obliged to buy day by day, as their money or their credit will allow ; then there is a fried fish shop, round the door of which a few shoeless and ragged children are generally standing, eagerly sniffing the savoury odour of plaice and flounders.

In Sharp's Court there are half-a-dozen old houses—dilapidated, mean, blackened with soot and smoke, with a cistern in the yard from which miserable-looking women are drawing water for household use—a scanty supply being common to the whole of the little community. A few of the windows have flowers in them ; in one there is even a little rustic gate and a

stile, enclosing some withered plants—remotely suggestive of pleasant gardens and country scenes. Not far off is Queenhithe, where of old the London apprentices came down to disport themselves upon the water—a custom which seems to have descended to their successors. Between one and two o'clock, which is their dinner-hour, they still sally forth tumultuously from the warehouses close by, a rushing, noisy crowd, taking their pleasure, not sadly, but with immense energy and animation, delighting in nothing but rough gambols and horse-play—such sports as will *hurt*. Their lightest frolics would cause the bones of most men to ache for a week. If a boat is lying on the bank, they will get into it and row up and down the Thames, rolling and floundering from side to side, with short pipes in their mouths and paper caps stuck all awry upon their heads

—singing, shouting, laughing, an exact reproduction in real life of one of Hogarth's pictures. At the stroke of two they scramble out of the boats, and go off with a devil-may-care gait, and with loud yells and shrill whistles, to their dye or indigo warehouses—for their blue faces and stained paper caps reveal the nature of their employment. After seven o'clock, these stormy youths have all departed, and their quarter of the city, like the rest, is given over to silence.

One afternoon, after the bustle of the day was over, a man stood leaning against the wall which flanks the river at the end of Queenhithe, waiting in no very patient mood for the appearance of some friend who had been anxiously expected. Queenhithe is an open space, and anyone approaching it could have been seen in a moment, but neither man nor woman came

in sight, except occasionally one of those strange prowlers of the streets, who go about with a bag slung over their shoulders, always expecting to pick up a treasure, and rarely finding anything more valuable than pieces of paper and string. The man looked on at their proceedings with manifest contempt for the want of spirit which led them to seek a living in this precarious way. He was evidently poor himself, but there was a careless, easy-going air about him, which showed that to some extent he was the master of circumstances, and this made itself visible even in the midst of the fit of dejection which suddenly fell upon him.

‘I might as well have thrown myself into that river long ago,’ he murmured, ‘for all the good I am to myself or anybody else. I go on steadily from bad to worse, and, unless luck takes a turn, I shall have

to chuck up the sponge very soon! Confound it,' he exclaimed, with an angry movement, 'I am getting hipped to-day! That won't help me much! Pull yourself together, Tom Finch, my boy—pull yourself together, and go in for the next move in the campaign. So far as I can see, things are approaching a crisis, and we shall soon know what we have got to expect. That old fellow down in Wales is a tough one, but he can't live for ever. When he is once gone, our man *must* do something for Emily and me. Well, Master Sam,' he continued, as he gave one more glance round the streets, and found them quite deserted, 'you have made a fool of me this time, but you won't do it again in a hurry. If I don't hear from you before the night is out, you shall hear from *me* to some tune to-morrow morning!'

As if roused by this decision, he turned

suddenly from the wharf, and made his way towards a court in Garlick Hill, where three or four houses still stand, near the ugliest of Wren's churches, in a tolerably fair state of preservation. Finch and his daughter—who was known in the neighbourhood as Mrs. Martin—dwelt in the least gloomy of these houses, on the first floor—for the whole place was let out in lodgings. Why Finch had chosen this particular locality it would not have been easy for anyone but himself to have explained. He doubtless had strong reasons, and they sufficed to keep him where he was.

When he was disposed to work, which was not often, his education enabled him to earn a fair sum of money as a copyist, and once it had done much more than that for him. There had been a time in his life when wealth and reputation were both

within his reach, for he had not only a great fund of scholarship to draw upon, but the art of imparting it to others—and that is an art which, whatever else may be said of it, can at least be made to pay. But there were two fatal flaws in his composition—he was destitute of principle, and he was incapable of self-denial. Money he would have, and drink he would not do without.

Some years before this, he had made free with the name of one of his pupils in order that he might raise money in a moment of necessity. He was not prosecuted, but his character was gone, and he became a wanderer. At fitful intervals he made an effort to save himself, and such were his abilities that he was seldom without employment. Then there came relapse after relapse, and at last all vestige of respect for himself and of pity for his

family were gone. His wife died; his daughter was dragged down with him in his ruin.

This daughter was now awaiting his return, and as Finch entered the small room where she was seated, lazily turning over the leaves of a book, she uttered a word or two of greeting, but no smile was exchanged between them. The window looked out upon a yard where a group of ragged little urchins were playing, but the very sky was hidden by a huge warehouse which overhung the court, and threatened at any moment to topple over and engulf it. The woman was not more than thirty years of age, and she had evidently been handsome; she was good-looking even now. But there was a hard look in her eyes, and a recklessness in her bearing which repelled one; a careful observer

would have noted that she was becoming ominously like her father.

Finch flung his hat down upon a chest of drawers which stood in a corner, one of the relics of his old home which served to remind him of better days. He seemed both tired and disappointed, and his daughter, after watching him a moment or two in silence, rose up from her chair, drew a shawl closer around her, and moved towards the door.

‘Where are you going?’ said the man, irritably.

‘I was going to see if I could get some tea for you—you look as if you wanted something. We have nothing stronger in the house just now.’

There was a slight touch of sarcasm in her tones which was not lost upon her father.

‘ Well, then, you can keep it for your own enjoyment,’ said he. ‘ I think I know where there’s a little brandy ;’ here he turned to one of the drawers, and, after rummaging in it for some time, produced a little black bottle—‘ the remains of a bottle which *he* gave me.’

‘ When ?’ asked the woman, sharply.

‘ Oh, long ago ; don’t be afraid—he’s not likely to give me much now. And so this is the last,’ he went on, as he poured some out into a tumbler and began drinking it, apparently forgetting all about the water. ‘ Everything is low with us ; can’t very well be much lower. The coals are nearly all gone, we owe a fortnight’s rent, and that fine fellow who has been promising all the week to be here, has not condescended to show himself.’

‘ Why should he—why should anybody come here ?’

‘ You would have been sulky for a whole week if some one else had said that.’

‘ Not at all; my day is over. He has got tired of me, and I don’t wonder at it. I’m not a very cheerful companion for anyone now-a-days.’

She spoke as if to a stranger, and showed no trace of feeling of any kind. Her callousness seemed to bring out still more strongly her resemblance to her father.

‘ You’re out of conceit with yourself, Emily,’ said Finch, in a tone of mock sympathy; ‘ women ought not to get like that, it doesn’t pay. When they acknowledge the game is over, it *is* over with a vengeance! And mighty sorry for it they are, depend upon it, when it comes to that.’

‘ And so your man did not come after all,’ responded the woman, as if weary of the subject.

‘ *My* man—how nicely you put it! I

was waiting for Sam Rafferty ; I suppose you understood that? Last night he was to have met me, and the night before, and again to-night. Always the same result ! He leaves me to kick my heels in the cold, while he's off enjoying himself at somebody else's expense. I have stood it about long enough,' he growled, between his teeth.

'Then I would not stand it any longer,' said the woman, laughing slightly. 'If you have got out of him all you *can* get, let him go, like the others.'

'The others ! Well, you're a cool hand.'

He sat looking at her with the sort of admiration due to one who surpassed him in his own special line.

'I ought to be by this time ; think how long I have been practising my lessons. I say again, if Sam is drained dry, why not

turn him off? You are not much given to wasting your time.'

'You're right, but I have not quite done with him yet. We have *some* claims upon him, I suppose? You may be willing to forget them, but I am not. I would have brought him to his senses long ago if it had not been for you!'

'Then do not let me restrain you any longer,' said the woman, still in a scoffing tone. 'Bring him to his senses, by all means—you will have a long way to drag him, but it will do him good. Deal with him as you have dealt with most of our friends.'

'For heaven's sake drop that savage style of yours,' exclaimed Finch, whose jaunty bearing seemed to have been left somewhere out of doors. 'Haven't I troubles enough without you trying to increase them? You won't let me ask

Sam for money—so be it! But you cannot object to our doing a little business together?’

‘What sort of business,’ asked the woman, with an irritating smile.

‘The sort that pays! Let that be enough for you to know. When he comes here, don’t let him see that you know anything at all about it. He is very suspicious, and will soon find out by your manner, unless you are careful, that I have told you too much.’

‘Well, he seems in no hurry to come here!’

‘No, but I will make him. We are getting to our last shilling, and money I must have—oh, not from your husband,’ he added, hastily, seeing an angry flush on his daughter’s cheek. ‘You are too fast in jumping to conclusions. We may have business to settle, but I am not to take any

money—isn't that the agreement we have about your husband?'

'I am glad you remember it,' said the woman, still ruffled by the storm that had suddenly passed over her.

'Certainly, I remember it—you have dinned it often enough into my ears. He is safe enough so far as I am concerned, though I think you are a great deal too easy with him. What's the use of having you married to a man who has lots of money——'

'Has he?' interrupted the woman. 'I never heard of that.'

'Well, he *will* have; it's the same thing.'

'Never heard that, either,' said the woman. 'The future and the present are not quite the same.'

'You are very aggravating to-night—a little more so than usual, I think. But I'

know it's of no use to get out of temper with you. Yet you might as well listen to what I've got to say.'

'Finish soon, then—let me get back to my book. We've talked this over a thousand times before.'

'So we have, and you are as obstinate as ever now. Why don't you look at the matter in a sensible way?'

'That is just what I do,' replied the woman, with a more serious manner than she had yet adopted. 'My husband, as you well know, is not rich; our marriage was a bad speculation on all sides.'

'You are right enough there!' cried Finch, dashing his pipe to the ground in a fit of anger and disgust.

'It didn't pay you, and it doesn't seem to have paid *him*! He is dependent upon others, and I believe he has to work hard.——'

Finch turned, and looked at his daughter in bewilderment.

‘Are you speaking,’ said he, in a hesitating voice, ‘of—of anyone in Australia?’

‘I am referring to what is going on *here*,’ she answered, out of patience, apparently, with his obtuseness. ‘What are you maundering about Australia for?’

‘I didn’t know what you meant, Emily,’ said Finch, in a deprecating manner.

‘It’s easy enough to understand. This husband of mine—here in England, if you must have everything explained—is dependent upon others for all he has. Let our marriage once be made known, and he will be turned loose a beggar. You found out all that long ago, although now you always pretend to be so dreadfully surprised when it is mentioned.’

‘I know that he is afraid of his dear parent,’ said Finch, laughing.

‘And he is entirely *dependent* on his dear parent—that is the thing for you to consider. Apart from all that,’ continued the woman, slowly and emphatically, ‘I believe he has done the best he could for us, and I would not take another penny from him even if I were starving!’

‘Then I would,’ replied the father, impetuously, and bringing his hand down heavily upon the table.

‘You have not done so,’ said the woman, confronting him suddenly with flashing eyes. ‘You have not been to him for money—or threatened him?’

‘No,’ muttered Finch, with a cowed look.

‘It is well for us both that you have not,’ she said, fiercely. ‘Do *that*, and it will be your worst day’s work yet! Levy your blackmail where you please, but spare *him* you must and shall!’

‘Blackmail!’ repeated Finch, stung be

yond endurance. 'Do you know what you are saying?'

'Too well! I understand what I mean, and so do you.'

'You will expose me, I suppose?' said Finch, white, but gradually mastering himself. 'Am *I* the only one, then, in this house who has reason to fear the law?'

'I don't know anything about our fellow-lodgers' lives,' replied the woman, resuming her listless attitude before the fire. 'As for myself, I have acted under your directions—*orders* would be the proper word. You have made two allusions to-night to matters that are best left alone.'

'Then why do you provoke me so?'

'We have bitter wrongs between us, father—they will make themselves seen and heard now and then, I suppose. But don't let us quarrel any more about my husband. That reminds me—how is it

your friend Daly has not been here lately?’

‘Never mind about him; *he* is all right enough. I expect him here presently. I only wish Sam were half as good a fellow.’

‘I thought we had had enough of that,’ said the woman, who evidently was easily inflamed to anger again. ‘Why not drop it altogether? As for Daly, if he is coming, I am going. Somehow, I am half afraid of that man.’

‘Why, what is there to be afraid of?’ asked the father, a little surprised. ‘You have never even seen him yet. Wait till he comes now, at any rate. He might have something to say that would interest you.’

Finch dropped these words one by one very cautiously, as if he felt great doubt how they would be received.

‘Does *he* know anything of our affairs?’

Is this another of your plans for my advantage, father?’

There was a reproachful look in her eyes as she put this question, which seemed to have the power to touch even the heart of Thomas Finch, or he chose to pretend that it had.

‘I have done badly by you, my girl,’ said he, in a penitent voice; ‘I can’t deny it. But I do not talk about you or your affairs to men like Daly. He knows your husband’—she started, and he continued, hurriedly—‘have no fear! I will not mention him before that Irishman, or before anybody else, except in a way you cannot object to. But at least remember one thing: Sam and Daly are good friends, and there is no harm in talking of one before the other. Daly could help you, I think, if you would only let him.’

‘I want none of his help—he shall

not come here under any such pretence.'

'Very well, then—he shall not,' said the father, soothingly. 'You are not in it at all. Daly is coming here to see me, but if he should happen to mention Sam, don't go to work imagining that there's some plot brewing, that's all! Daly does not know anything, remember,' added Finch, in a half-whisper, 'and, whatever secrets we may have, I fancy Daly is not very likely to learn them from Sam. All the same, Sam has used me badly, mind you, and I intend to let him know it.' He warmed up rapidly when he saw that his daughter had resumed her book, and seemed to be paying little or no attention to him. 'Sam Rafferty and I,' he said, 'have a little account of our own to settle, and I do not mean to let him get out of it if all the world stood in the way. Understand that.'

He stamped his foot upon the floor, making the old boards rattle all over the room.

‘Don’t talk so loud,’ said his daughter, coolly, ‘or bang the floor about as if we owned it. People will think we are getting up a dance. And then there is that old woman in the room below; she is dying.’

‘Then it can’t hurt *her*,’ replied Finch, with a brutal laugh. ‘She is better off than we are. We live on a crust of dry bread when we ought to be rolling in riches. Everybody knows you as Mrs. Martin. Mrs. Fiddlesticks! What’s it all for? What right has your husband to hide his wife away in a slum like this? I consented to it at first, but it has lasted long enough, and now it must stop. Put an end to all this mummary, or let me do it for you. Why is it to go on?’

‘Because I choose that it shall,’ said the woman, firmly ; and whenever she spoke in this tone Finch’s courage seemed to evaporate. ‘Let me remind you that this young man married me when he fancied he was in love, and you deceived both him and me. You misled me grossly ; how much more grossly you betrayed him, I need not tell you ! You thought he had plenty of money, but it was not his fault that you thought so. He never deceived you ! When I think of it all now, I am sorry for him. He never did me harm, and I will see none done to him now—no more than has been done, I mean. I can’t undo the past !’

‘I don’t see why not, since you are so mighty generous !’

‘Well, I dare not then—take it that way, if you like. Only I tell you once again, I will not stand by and see him

completely ruined, and, if he once fell into your hands, nothing could save him from ruin !’

‘That is a pretty thing to say to your own father,’ said Finch, with an attempt to resume his light touch-and-go manner.

‘Pretty and true ! Think it over. If you are so hard pressed for money as you say, get it from this man Daly. Give your new friends a turn sometimes as well as the old. Or does Daly know too much ?’

‘My dutiful child,’ replied Finch, in a jocose mood again, ‘Daly gets most of his money, I have reason to believe, from our dear Sam Rafferty, so it all works round in a circle, you see. I did hope to have seen them both to-night—whichever comes first must pay the piper, whether you like it or not, Emily.’

‘Hark !’ said the woman, holding up her

finger. 'I think I hear the fortunate man coming up the stairs.'

Both listened, but for a minute or two there was not a sound to be heard.

'It must have been the undertaker's man,' said Finch, with a grin; 'somebody or other is always finding a job for him in these parts. Why, it's Sam's voice, surely!' he added, as he stood listening intently.

In another instant a sharp rap was heard upon the door.

'Come in,' cried Finch, a little nervously. Somehow or other the rap had startled both father and daughter, and they stood staring silently at one another.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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